REVIEWED

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The future of acoustic?

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Hollow body heaven

AUSTRALIAN guitar

THE REAL PLAYER'S PICK

Amyl and the Sniffers

On punk solos and Cartoon Darkness

Electric Lady Studios

Exploring the history of Jimi Hendrix's final brainwave

The Rolling Stones

A massive seven page technique guide

His most iconic axes go under the hammer

50 years of Blow by Blow!

MC5, Orianthi, Dream Theater, Steve Hackett, Cacophony & more!

Jeff Beck

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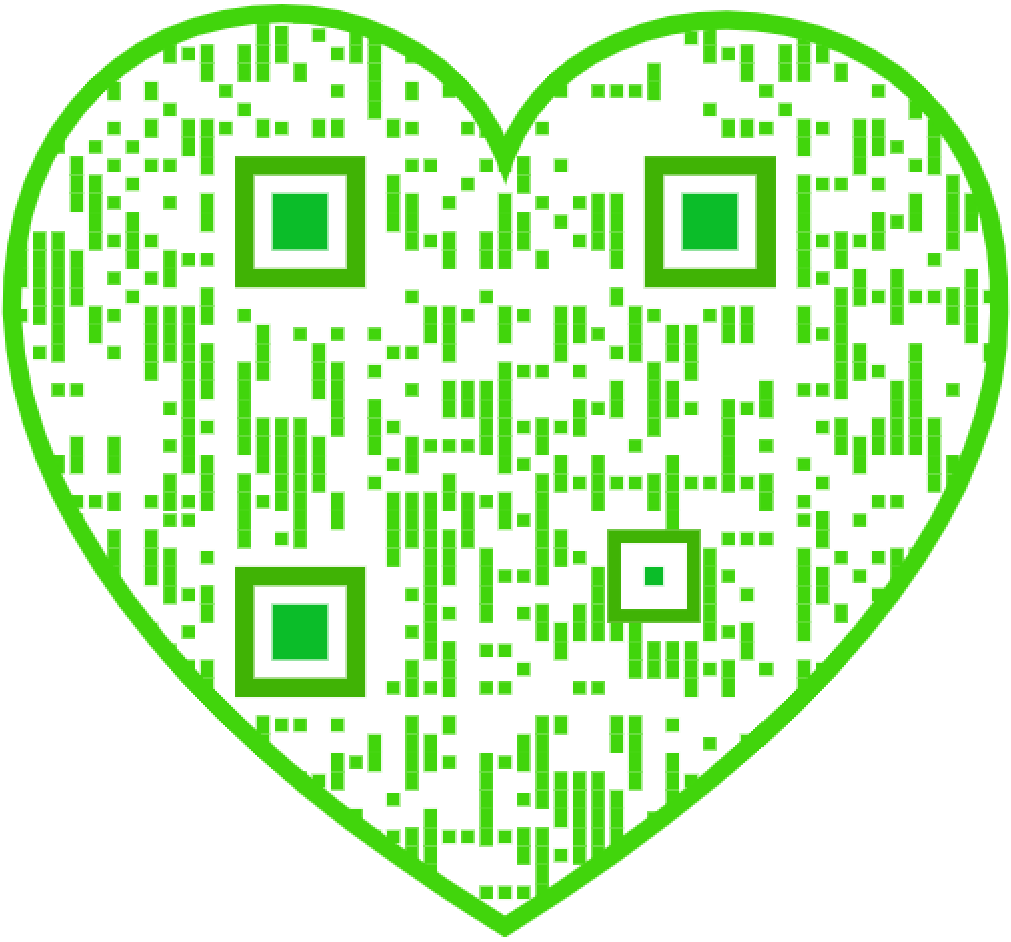

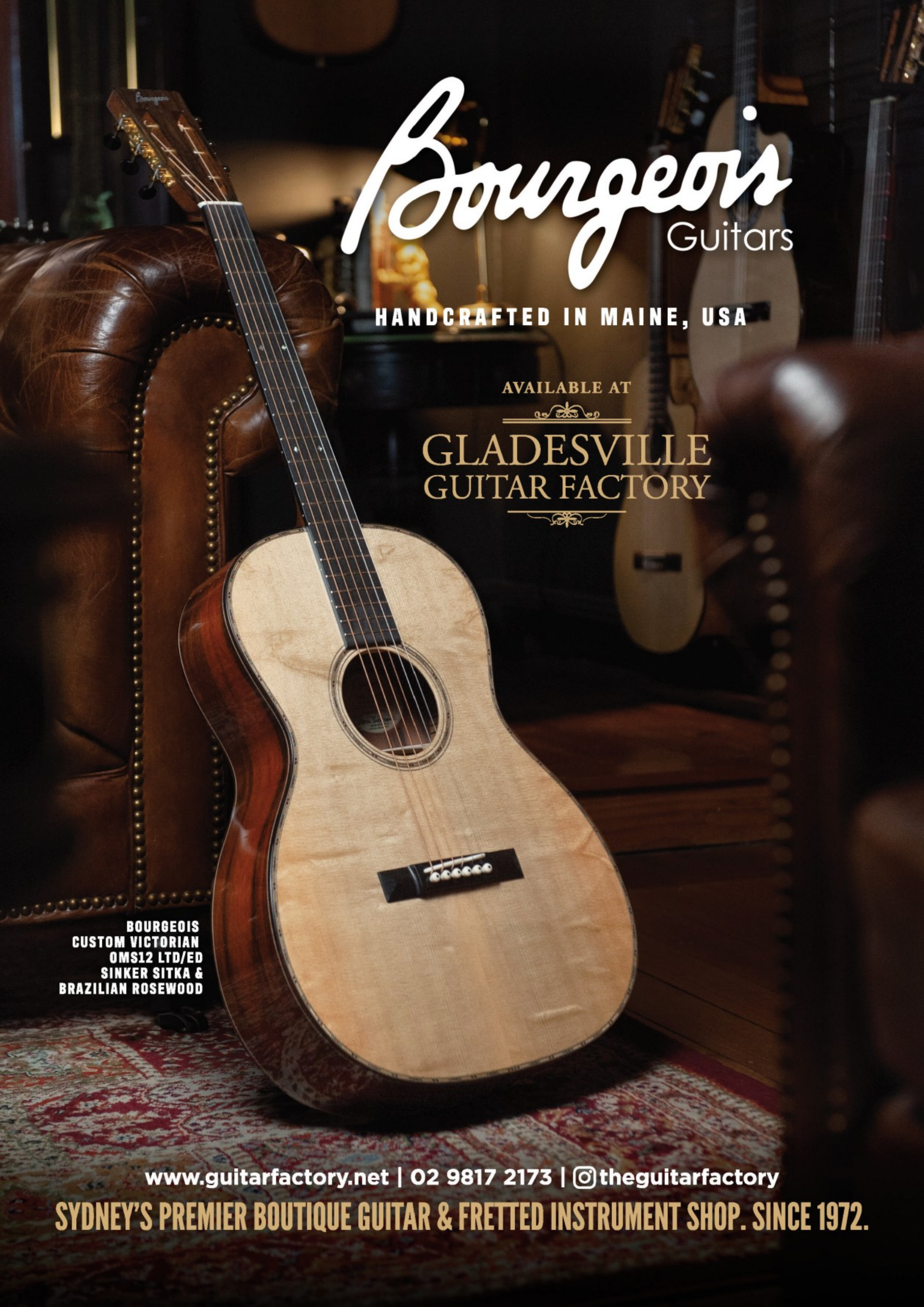

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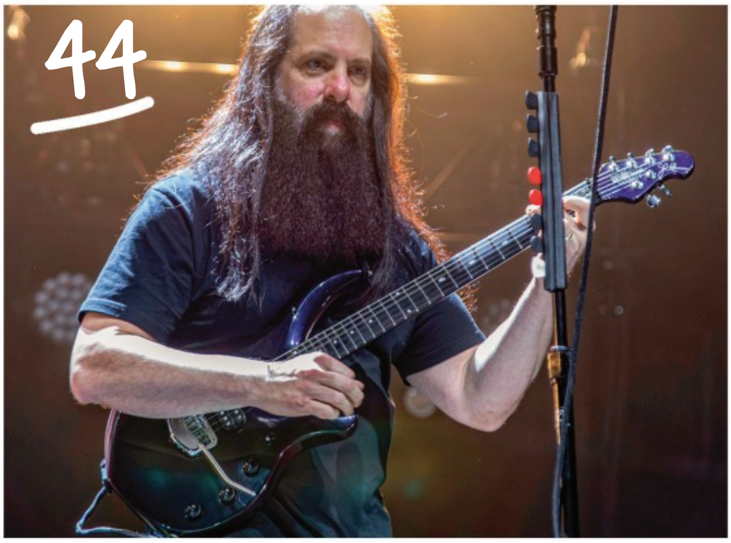
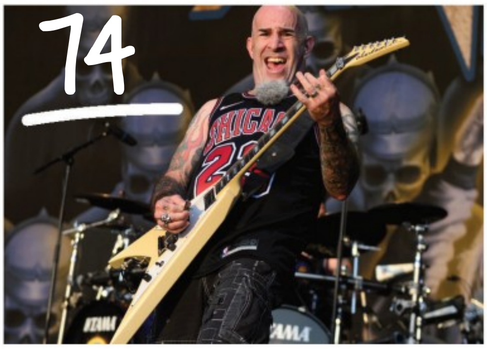
SYDNEY'S PREMIER BOUTIQUE GUITAR & FRETTED INSTRUMENT SHOP. SINCE 1972.





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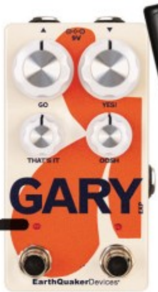

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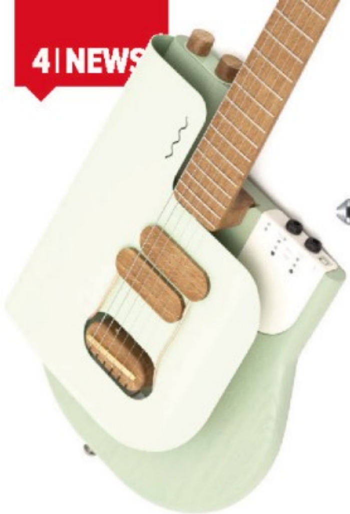


SUPPLIED

THE **VERSO SINE** IS A FUTURISTIC ELECTRIC WITH FREELY MOVABLE PICKUPS

Last month's NAMM show wasn't just about legacy brands unveiling new additions to familiar lineups: it was also for experimentalists looking to break new ground in instrument innovation – and Verso is continuing that tradition with its bonkers new Sine electric guitar.

You need only take a glance at the Verso Sine to realize you're not dealing with your average six-string here, but the developments it ushers in for guitar design go way beyond the outlandish looks and futuristic – albeit slightly intimidating – ergonomics. Because although the Verso Sine looks very much like a guitar of the future, it behaves like one, too: not only does it have freely movable pickups, it also boasts an interactive Sine Pad that looks to revolutionize expression on the guitar.

The pickup system is something Verso employs across its entire collection. The Sine offers a three-dimensional pickup setup, which effectively replaces a fixed selector switch with a far more experimental alternative approach. In action, all you have to do is literally grab the pickup – which has been magnetically mounted to a wrap-around steel pickguard – and slide it to its desired location. Want some fatter neck pickup tones? Easy. Fancy beefing up the leads with more bridge action? No problem. Want to experiment endlessly with every position in between, or try something entirely new? Help yourself.

The Verso Sine's pickguard also doubles as a Sine Pad, which can be pressed in order to control volume swells. Not only that, thanks to some Lehle-design tech, reverb trails and pitch can also be adjusted on the fly through playing with the pad by connecting it to pedals and synths. Elsewhere, there's a USB MIDI control for DAW compatibility, and volume and pickup blend knobs.

Despite the flashy tech, Verso has clearly refused to compromise on components, with the Sine offering a solid ash body, C-shape neck in either ash, maple, cherry, oak or walnut, and 22 Jescar Jumbo frets. They don't come cheap: while Australian prices aren't available at versoinstruments.com, the €2,970 price translates to nearly $5,000. **Words by Matt Owen**

IBANEZ GLIDELINE INSTRUMENT CABLE
IBANEZ GLIDELINE INSTRUMENT CABLE

SUPPLIED

IBANEZ AND JTC CLAIM TO HAVE CREATED THE WORLD'S MOST ADVANCED GUITAR CABLE

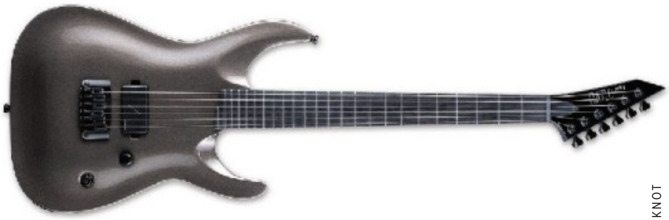
Guitar cables aren't the sexiest of products, but they're a vital part of a guitarist's day-to-day life – and a low-quality cable can massively hinder guitar tones. That's led to a new collaboration between Ibanez and digital guitar education platform JTC to deliver what has been described as "the world's most advanced guitar cable."

The "pioneering" cable is suitable for players of all skill levels, apparently, and is headlined by the collaboration's new Glideline tech, which is being hyped as "the next step in cable technology". But what makes it so special?

Essentially, it has been designed to "elevate signal chain and eliminate any compromise to your tonal identity" to transfer a super high-resolution signal from electric guitars to amps, amp modelers, and audio interfaces (just like any other cable, we might add). The fancy new cable has been crafted with premium materials, including an ion-plated copper cap, special layers of insulation, and semi-conductive and braided shields to keep the cable's core in tip-top condition. Each material has been selected and engineered for lower capacitance to allow more natural sounds to weave through the cable and blast out of the other end, therefore "unlocking the instrument's full tonal potential".

JTC tapped into its roster of artists to put the cables "in the hands of some of the world's finest players" – including the down-picking metal machine Clayton King. That saw those players put the design through its paces via "extensive real-world testing". So, though the cable is new to the market, it sounds like it has already proved its mettle on stages and studios many times over.

At the time of writing, only straight jack cable variants are available. So, if you're an angled jack stan, you may have to wait a little longer to join the future of guitar cables… if it's as good as we're told it is. **Words by Phil Weller**



SLIPKNOT

MICK THOMSON'S LONG-AWAITED ESP SIGNATURE GUITAR IS FINALLY HERE – BUT IT'S NOT WHAT WE EXPECTED

After years of rumours that ESP planned to release a Mick Thomson signature, the Slipknot legend is finally getting his dues with the LTD MT-I. However, despite the lengthy wait, the final form of the flagship MT-I might surprise a few fans.

Sure, it retains the double-cut Strat-style shape that Thomson favoured for some of his Jackson signatures – and, indeed, for some of the custom ESPs he has been playing on the road – but it in turn opts for a rather unexpected spec. Extra tonal capacity is provided via to a two-way Voice toggle, however, while a push/pull volume pot for accessing a third Voice.

That is namely the pickup configuration. Whereas Thomson's older Jacksons opted for an HH setup, the MT-I settles on just one bridge pickup – a Fishman Fluence Mick Thomson humbucker, to be precise. Still, it's a significant departure from Thomson's signatures of old. The guitarist has also had signatures with Ibanez and B.C. Rich, all of which have come packing two humbuckers.

It's probably worth caveating that this could be the first in an entire series of Mick Thomson signatures, and so that familiar pickup configuration could crop up on later models further down the line.
Words by Matt Owen

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#162

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TUNE-UPS

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Stench of Darkness

AMYL AND THE SNIFFERS' GUITARIST DECLAN MARTENS AIMS TO SOUND LIKE ANGUS AND MALCOLM YOUNG TOGETHER. HE DISCUSSES HIS LOVE OF CHUNKY STRINGS, HOW TO MAKE GUITAR SOLOS PUNK, AND USING DAVE GROHL'S GUITARS WHILE RECORDING IN THE FOO FIGHTERS' STUDIO

Words by Jonathan Horsley.

GETTY

WHEN WRITING FOR a vocalist like Amyl and the Sniffers' Amy Taylor, punk-rock orthodoxy isn't going to move the needle – not when she tears into the mic with stream-of-consciousness verses, using C- and F-bombs for punctuation. "The traditional sort of, 'Here's four chords, Amy, what can you do on that?' doesn't work for her," guitarist Declan Martens agrees. "She needs to feel the craziness she has on stage when she's writing, otherwise she's not inspired. I need to entertain Amy to get her to choose my riffs to write to. I guess it's just like taking vegetables to a toddler and being like, 'Please eat this!'"

That's why it's such a thrill to press play on the Australian pub punks' third album, *Cartoon Darkness*: you don't know what's coming next. Tracked at the Foo Fighters' Studio 606 in LA, it opens with a wall of electric guitar noise – a la Ron Asheton on the Stooges' 'I Wanna Be Your Dog'. Then it goes through all kinds of evolutionary convulsions, Martens dragging his guitar through the after-hours trippiness of 'Big Dreams', the super-downtuned fuzz of 'It's Mine', right on through to the demo-happy closer 'Me and the Girls', which is more hip-hop inspired.

"In the past we wrote for performing, for how we were gonna do it live," he says. "This album, we were like, 'Well, we've got our hour set – why don't we see what we can do in a studio setting? Some of the types of songs that we haven't been able to write before, why don't we try to attempt those?'"

You've talked about producer Nick Launay finding tones for you, freeing you to concentrate on playing. But how important is the guitar itself?

I learned to play on a Strat. I feel like I'm Ritchie Blackmore – even though I know I'm very far from that. But I feel like, when I do a solo on a Strat, it's like, 'Check me out – I'm fucking sick!' On a Gibson Explorer, the way it's weighted, I feel stronger and tougher. Playing the Flying V, I feel sexier – the way it goes on your leg and you can get your hips in there a little bit!

Playing the different guitars differently comes from how I interact with them physically, more than how I actually play them with my fingers. Like the Explorer: I hit the hell out of it. It's just a big block of wood. And usually it stays in tune!

GETTY

People call you a reluctant shredder. How do you see the concept of shredding and virtuosity in punk?

Two punk bands were really important to me when I was younger that have incredible guitar solos. Cosmic Psychos were a massive influence on Amyl and the Sniffers; they're kind of like Motörhead but a bit more punk. As an Australian, getting drunk at the pub when we were younger, it's the same sort of thing as AC/DC. It's like this great punk song, we're all pissed at the pub, and the next thing is there's a mad solo! I love it.

The band Brats from Denmark in the early '80s had got two insane Flying V guitarists. They're the best hybrid of punk

"Playing the different guitars differently comes from how I interact with them physically, more than how I actually play them with my fingers. Like the Explorer: I hit the hell out of it. It's just a big block of wood. And usually it stays in tune!"

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and metal I've ever heard. They went on to form Mercyful Fate, which is crazy. I found their record when I was 21, when Amyl first started. Back then I didn't like solos and I couldn't do them; I wished I could do them but I couldn't. When I heard this album by Brats I was like, 'Holy fuck, I need to learn how to do a guitar solo!'

There's definitely a space for it. The way punk bands express themselves through vocals and rhythms, and that down-picking, I just apply the same thing to my solos. I just go as crazy as I can.

How did your solo on 'Pigs' come about?
You're hearing a shredder struggling on 11 flatwound strings trying to solo! On this album I'd do all the tracks flatwound. If there's a solo I would also solo flatwound, then later we'd drop in an overdubbed solo with roundwound strings and a much nicer tone. With that one, maybe we forgot... we just kept it in. The influence is 'Thunder and Lightning' by Thin Lizzy. I've always thought it sounds like something from Jurassic

GETTY

Park, so I tried to mimic that. Nick, our producer, was like, 'Do you want to redo this solo? At the end you kind of just keep doing the same thing.' And I was like, 'No, keep it in. I like it.'

Presumably you were using different guitars – how would you choose guitars to complement that first take on flat-wounds?
For the double-tracking it was mostly the Explorer with a Loller P-90. In 'Chewing Gum', the high bit in the verse was roundwound, and the intro for 'Big Dreams' was roundwound. That was on one of Dave Grohl's Trini Lopez guitars. Then solos and lead lines were roundwound, just to bring it a bit of life. But I really loved flatwounds for this album. Henry Cash from Starcrawler lent me a whole bunch of Teles, so the solo on 'Bailing on Me' is a Tele with roundwounds. Flats have a different feel. It's quite solid.

And you like your strings heavy?
It's been a journey. We just had a rehearsal where I had my 9-46s leftover from the last tour. I was like, 'Fuck, I can't play the new album on this gauge!' On this album it was really important to get the single-note string hits very precise and in time. It sounds kind of wispy-wimpy on a lighter gauge. On this next tour, I'm going to have to go up a gauge.

Besides Dave Grohl's Trini, were there any super-fancy things kicking around at Studio 606 that you used?
We used a cabinet that belonged to a tech who worked for Carlos Alomar and Robert Fripp. We used an Ampeg V-4 guitar amp. We used a 100-watt Hiwatt – a custom made for Studio 606. It had the XLR-shaped switch in the front of it; Jimmy Page had a custom one set up like that.

"We play a half-step down, but that's drop G#, so the A and the E string are tuned to the same note an octave out – A goes down to G# and E goes all the way down to an octave-down G#. I heard Matt Sweeney from Guitar Moves did that."

Speaking specifically tone, what are we hearing on 'Me and the Girls'?
I'm just playing the octaves; it's really driven. I was trying to get an Eddie Van Halen tone going through a phaser. Then there's that weird boing noise, and that's one those mouth harp things. I had this crazy idea about using an envelope filter into a fuzz with a talkbox, and trying to do a saxophone noise – but that will have to be on the next album.

Your solo on 'Do It Do It' sounds amazing with those chewy doublestops and that rhythm-lead thing. It's very Angus Young or Chuck Berry.
That solo was influenced by an Australian power-pop band called Sunnyboys, so I guess maybe that guy was influenced by AC/DC. But I've always called it the Chuck Berry thing... I learned it from Angus. That was the first solo thing I learned ... unfortunately I probably use it way too much! But it's good fun.

What did you tune down to on It's Mine?
We play a half-step down, but that's drop G#, so the A and the E string are tuned to the same note an octave out – A goes down to G# and E goes all the way down to an octave-down G#. I heard Matt Sweeney from Guitar Moves did that.

The fuzz sound is amazing.
It was the Boss FZ-2 Hyper Fuzz. It ended up being used on a lot of the album, even when there aren't fuzz tones. I heard Stevie Ray Vaughan ran one of those Dunlop Fuzz Faces clean for his clean tone; I was like, 'Fuck, if Stevie can do it, I can do it.'

What other effects were you using?
I modded my MXR Distortion+. Off the shelf it comes with silicon diodes so I put LEDs in, and that gives it more headroom and angrier distortion. But I don't use that for a heavy distortion tone; I sort of use it as a preamp. I pretty much have both controls on midday and use it for a little coloring.

Who are your tone idols?
For this album, I got obsessed with Rolling Stones guitar tones from *Tattoo You, Some Girls, Exile on Main Street* and *Sticky Fingers*. A recent obsession is the difference between Malcolm and Angus Young on recordings.

I'm like a conspiracy theorist in bed at night with headphones on! I'm like, 'Wow, Malcolm's so clean!' Because that's what I want to do live – replicate Malcolm and Angus.

I've got a Hiwatt amp and a Park amp. With the Park I'm trying to get perfect Angus tone, and on the Hiwatt I'm trying to get perfect Malcolm tone, then blend them together so that I'm Malcolm and Angus together.

I imagine you're not overly bothered about recreating everything exactly as it is on the record.
Definitely. Our strength is our live performance, so I don't want to preoccupy myself too much. I hate those guitarists who look down at their pedals trying to nail every single part. It's super-important for me that we still go out there and do a really entertaining show. Live, there's so much more energy and distortion in the guitar tone than what there is on the album. If it's done in the right way it blows you away.

Amyl and the Sniffers' *Cartoon Darkness* is out now.

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Angus and Malcolm Young's childhood home destroyed

THE BURWOOD HOUSE WAS DEMOLISHED TO MAKE WAY FOR A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, DESPITE BEING ON THE NATIONAL TRUST REGISTER OF HISTORIC HOUSES

By Matt Owen

THE CHILDHOOD HOME of AC/DC guitar heroes Angus and Malcolm Young has been demolished, despite the fact it had been listed on the National Trust Register of Historic Houses. Located at 4 Burleigh Street in Burwood, Sydney, the property became the Young home when the family moved in back in 1965, the same year that the pair's older brother George Young released his debut album with The Easybeats.

In 1973, AC/DC formed at the address, and in 2013, it was added to the National Trust Register of Historic Houses. However, when it came to demolishing the property, the company responsible stressed it was unaware of the building's cultural significance.

"We regret that the previous long-term owner did not share this vital part of the property's background with us," says Burwood Square Pty Ltd general manager Leon Kmita. "Learning about this connection after our plans were already underway has shocked us. We are genuinely sorry for this oversight. On behalf of the team at Burwood Square, I want to convey our heartfelt regret. We now recognise how deeply this location resonates with the AC/DC community and fans worldwide. We feel a strong responsibility to honour AC/DC's legacy and to make amends to all the fans who hold this band in such high regard.

"While we cannot change the past, we are dedicated to celebrating this significant part of their story. To the global fanbase of AC/DC, please know that we hear you, appreciate your deep admiration for this legendary band, and are devoted to making this right."

The property was originally demolished to make way for a $28.75 million residential development, but now, in response to backlash from music fans, the site will be repurposed as a new tribute to AC/DC and the Young brothers. Using material salvaged from the property, the developers have vowed to set up a bar or cafe where fans can "gather to celebrate the band's enduring legacy".

In response to the demolition and fan backlash, the local council stressed that, despite the fact the property was listed on the National Trust Register of Historic Houses, it was not protected under local or state legislation.

"As it is not heritage listed or protected under local or state legislation, and because The National Trust is a community-based, non-government organisation, with no statutory authority, the property does not have enforceable protections. Burwood Council remains committed to finding new ways to celebrate the Young family and the area's rich musical heritage," the council writes.

Childhood homes of influential musicians and guitar stars are often seen as sites of cultural significance. In 2022, Paul McCartney opened his own childhood home for unsigned artists to write and perform.

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Machineheads	Vintage open gear (18:1 Ratio)
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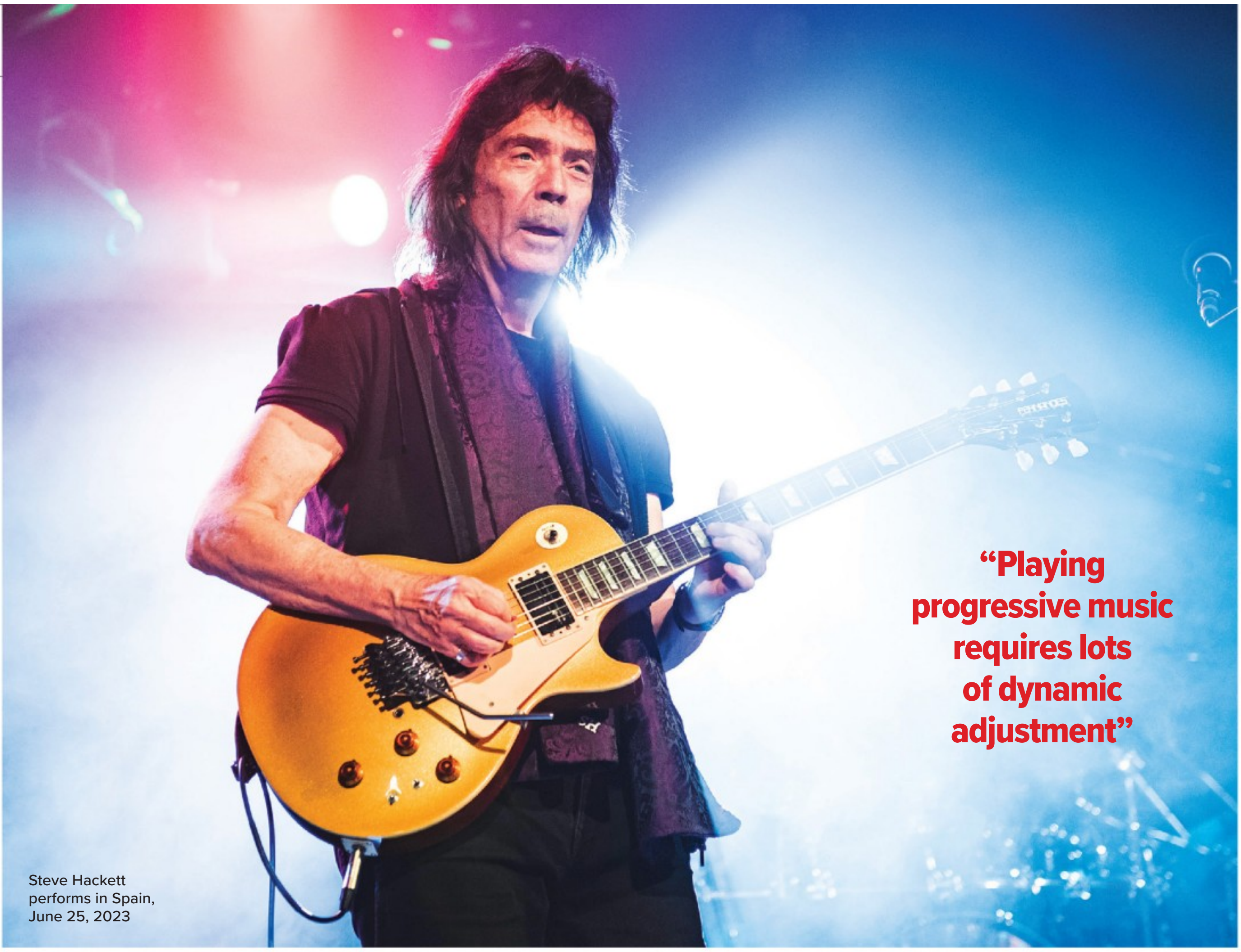


Steve Hackett performs in Spain, June 25, 2023

“Playing progressive music requires lots of dynamic adjustment”

MY PEDALBOARD

STEVE HACKETT

WHAT THE PROG-ROCK ICON SEES WHEN HE LOOKS DOWN

“I WANT TO have control over things. There is no tyranny of volume. At one time, you would have to crank up very loudly to achieve the same result on record. By using reverb, I’m creating an artificial space to give the sound perspective. Playing progressive music requires lots of dynamic adjustment, so the volume pedal is absolutely crucial to be able to vary my own place within the band’s mix.

“I’ve had a number of pedalboards over time. There are modern things that reproduce vintage sounds, which gives you a number of simulations. I’m often using amp simulators when recording, so I can perform a screaming guitar solo while comfortably holding a conversation with an engineer, even though the beast seems to be screaming out and shaking the walls.

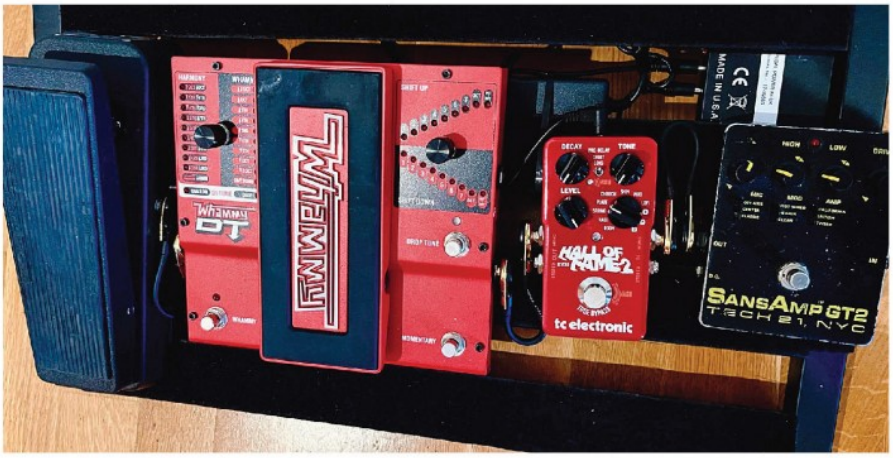
“It’s important not to kid yourself that just because you’re listening to something loudly, it’s the only way to create power. We’re all looking for lightning in a bottle. When playing live, there are moments when I have my pedals on full throttle doing the delinquent thing while everyone else is doing the same. Sometimes, you just can’t help yourself. After all, live rock ’n’ roll isn’t really about holding back!

“My smaller pedalboard starts with my Tech 21 SansAmp GT2 [*tube amp emulator*], which is very versatile. It provides very realistic tube distortion without having to crank up the sound. Next is my TC Electronic Hall of Fame 2 Reverb. For a tiny unit, it’s extremely versatile. It can give those small, roomy sounds and also can simulate large spaces. A great little tool!

“That leads to my DigiTech Whammy WH5 [*pitch shifter*]. This can be used in several ways and is a versatile unit, which gives fixed harmonies and makes extra octaves available. Lastly, there’s my Dunlop Volume Pedal; progressive music needs you to constantly rebalance, and this volume pedal is essential for dynamic shifts.”

Andrew Daly

IF I HAD TO CHOOSE ONLY ONE PEDAL FOR A FULL SHOW:
“It would probably be the Tech 21 SansAmp because it blasts away like a heavily cranked Marshall or two. It gives me the power I need to produce a thrilling sound.”



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X
Under The Big Black Sun

LOST CLASSICS: X

BILLY ZOOM RECOUNTS THE MAKING OF THE ICONIC L.A. PUNKS' 1982 MAJOR-LABEL DEBUT, *UNDER THE BIG BLACK SUN*

By Mark McStea

L.A. PUNK LEGENDS X made their major-label debut in 1982 with *Under the Big Black Sun*. The record, which followed two critically acclaimed indie releases — *Los Angeles* (1980) and *Wild Gift* (1981) — spotlights a more refined and polished version of their sound while not losing an ounce of the urgency of the previous two albums.

As always, at the heart of the band's — and the album's — sound was guitarist Billy Zoom's sparkling '55 Gretsch Silver Jet. Zoom's under-appreciated (and killer) chops are the lynchpin that ties together the left-of-center vocal stylings of Exene Cervenka and John Doe, not to mention D.J. Bonebrake's rock-solid drumming.

Below, Zoom discusses the making of *Under the Big Black Sun* and then gets into gear, the band's latest album and his Austin-Healey Sprite.

***Under the Big Black Sun* sounds much better than the two previous albums. Why is that?**

As I recall, the total Slash [indie label] recording budget for Wild Gift was $6,000, and Elektra's budget for Under the Big Black Sun was $60,000. We didn't have to rush through everything before we ran out of money and time. *Black Sun* was produced and recorded a little better than *Wild Gift* or *More Fun*, but those two were really bad. I've never been able to listen to them. Having said that, maybe it was just a fluke that it turned out better.

The songs are credited to John Doe and Exene Cervenka. Did you not have a lot of input?

D.J. and I contributed quite a bit on the music but not too much on the lyrics, if at all. We rehearsed a lot, worked songs out together, recorded them at rehearsal and then picked them apart and reassembled them, etc.

I remember reading that X was basically your concept, a band that'd combine elements of Eddie Cochran and the Ramones. How hard was it to find other musicians who were on the same page?

Not as hard as I'd expected. Finding a good drummer is always hard, but John was only the second bass player I auditioned. Of course, John's sort of quirky songwriting added a whole new dimension that I hadn't anticipated, and when Exene came along, things really turned into X rather than just Eddie Cochran meets the Ramones.

Did you have all the songs ready prior to going into the studio?

I think so, pretty much. We did a lot of rehearsing and pre-production work, but it did become more of a push with each album. We had a few years to come up with the material for the first two albums, but after L.A. came out, we were on tour most of the time and just came back to California to write new songs and record, so maybe four weeks to come up with the songs and arrangements.

Did the songs change much in the studio?

"Dancing with Tears" was one that only existed in my head. Unfortunately, it mostly stayed there. What I wanted was a distorted rhythm guitar playing Ramones-style power chords, but with that clean, twangy style double-note lead guitar floating on top of it. The problem was — and it was a recurring issue that came up often in the studio — [producer] Ray Manzarek hated the sound of distorted guitar chords. He just didn't think they belonged in music. So I kept playing them, and Ray would keep fiddling with knobs trying to fix the sound. In the end, that rhythm guitar was there, but you can't really hear it or figure out what it's trying to do. Ray was fine with distortion on leads, just not chords. That's why whenever there was an X song with clean chords, like "I Must Not Think Bad Thoughts," the guitar sounds awesome, but power chords always sounded like Ray had over-EQ'ed them, trying to make them not sound like punk rock chords. It was always very frustrating. Ray didn't really like punk rock, but he loved John and Exene's poetry.

What guitars and amps did you use?

Most of it was my 1955 Gretsch Silver Jet through John's Traynor bass head and a 4x10 cabinet that I built, but I always brought everything I had to the studio. I'd use one combination for one little overdub and something else for another part. The lead on "Dancing with Tears" was my 1958 Strat that I'd bought years before, from an old man, for $100.

You and D.J. clearly seem to be the band members with the chops. Was there any tension between you two and John and Exene, who had more primitive skills?

I don't know about D.J., but I think by the time we started X, I was already used to being the most talented and the most underappreciated band member. It's not always easy being Billy Zoom, but somebody has to do it.

There aren't many solos on X records, though what is there gets straight to the point with maximum effect. Were you frustrated at not being able to get in more solos, or were you more about the Ramones' side of the equation, where driving rhythm guitar was where it's at?

Every X song is a guitar solo from beginning to end. Sometimes John and Exene sing during my solos, but it doesn't bother me. I play while they sing, too. It's very rare that I just strum chords during the vocals. It's all structured and orchestrated.

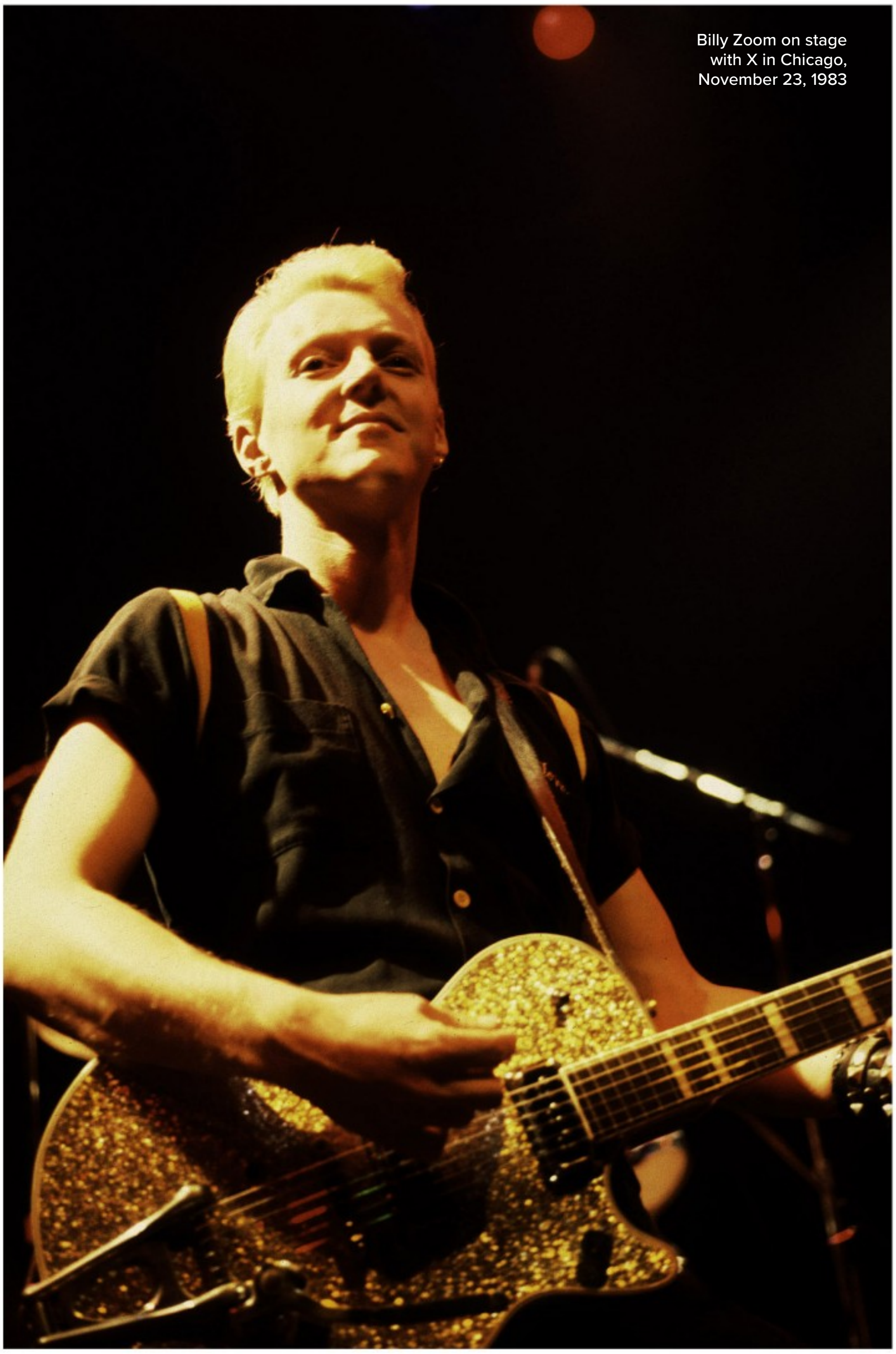
"Motel Room in My Bed" has a couple of quick killer breaks. Would they be off-the-cuff ideas, or would you try different approaches?

I don't recall. What I played seemed to fit there okay. I just provide different textures to make the lyrical textures stand out more. I try not to think about it too hard.

"Blue Spark" has a great rhythm guitar with the slides. I'm guessing that was your idea to do those slides after each chord?

We recorded "Blue Spark" for Dangerhouse [indie label] in 1977, but it was never released, because our drummer at the time was too bad, even for Dangerhouse. Fortunately, we found D.J. not long after that. On the Dangerhouse recording I had to borrow a fuzz tone for the slides. The studio wouldn't let us turn up loud enough to get real amp distortion. The title of the song was about the bumper cars on Santa Monica pier and the sparks they made when the contact on their antenna rubbed the ceiling, which was electrically energized. What I was trying to do was to make the slides sound like the buzz and sizzle of electricity arcing. I often try to make my guitar sound like the lyrics, either literally or like the feeling or mood that's being expressed. I want the sound of the song to be one integral thing — the lyrics, the beat, the guitar notes and tone; they should all be telling the same story.

"Come Back to Me" has some great rhythm lines. I guess that was no big deal for you with your extensive back-



Billy Zoom on stage with X in Chicago, November 23, 1983

ground in jazz, etc.

D.J. has the strongest jazz background. I like listening to good jazz, but I can't really play it very well. I can play jazzy, but more R&B-ish like maybe Ray Charles, not Thelonious Monk. "Come Back to Me" is more R&B, or at least that's where my head was when I played it. I was thinking of Steve Cropper; he's one of my heroes.

"How I Learned My Lesson" seems to be a lot closer to your Ramones template.

That was one of my favorites, but John and Exene don't like to do it live for some reason.

> "It's not always easy being Billy Zoom, but somebody has to do it"

"The Have Nots" has a great feel on the rhythm guitar — a perfect mix of clean and crunch. I guess that's probably a good description of your sound in general, isn't it? It's a great showcase for your playing in that it combines your great rhythm chops with cool lead lines.

I've always thought it was too fast on the record. We do it a little slower live. I do play cleaner than most modern guitarists, and it's always just the amp, no pedals. Just the amp, cranked. I was playing my Silver Jet, probably through the Traynor and 4x10 cabinet.

How did you feel about the album?

I never liked any of our records when they came out. I never liked the way any of our albums sounded until [2020's] *Alphabetland.*

What was your guitar journey, from your first beginner's guitar to your first pro-level guitar?

My dad had a tenor guitar; that's a skinny neck and four strings. You don't see them much anymore. There was no name on it, but I think it was a mail-order guitar, built by Harmony. My dad started teaching me how to play chords on that when I was six. When I was eight, I found a Harmony archtop acoustic in the basement of my grandmother's house, on the floor behind the oil tank for the furnace. When I was 15, I had a Hagstrom, then later, when I was 19, I had enough money to buy a pre-owned 1962 Guild Starfire III with DeArmond single coils and a Bigsby. That was as close to a Gretsch 6120 as I could get, but it got me all around the country, including a stint on the West Coast with Gene Vincent.

What are your go-to guitars these days?

For the last 10 years, I've been using a Gretsch G6122T-59 Vintage Select Chet Atkins Country Gentleman. It's a reissue of a 1959 Country Gentleman that Chet Atkins modified and used throughout the Sixties. It's a single cutaway, with a 25½-inch scale, a slightly wider fingerboard, a Bigsby with the Chet arm, a master volume, a bridge pickup volume and a tone knob. I replaced the pickups with a Kent Armstrong vintage P90 at the bridge and a Seymour Duncan DeArmond at the neck. It has the stock bar bridge, but I installed Grover locking tuners because it makes it easier to change strings with a Bigsby, and my fingers aren't as nimble as they used to be. My arthritic fingers also prefer the longer scale and wider fingerboard. In my opinion, these G6122T-59s are the best guitars Gretsch ever made, period. I also have a silver 1999 Fender Custom Shop Strat and a custom Danelectro six-string bass that's in silver sparkle with three pickups. Those three are my main studio tools, along with my '55 Silver Jet, which still gets some studio use.

Who were your main influences?

Let me just say this: when I play rock 'n' roll guitar, I imagine Jerry Lee Lewis' piano. When I play tenor sax, I imagine Little Richard's voice.

What's coming up?

We just finished our last album, [2024's] *Smoke & Fiction.* The first farewell tour started in July. We'll be on the road a bunch, even more than usual. I'd like to design some more amps and recording gear, and whenever I get a chance, I'll be driving through the hills of Orange County in my Austin-Healey Sprite.

CARVIN
CARVIN

MEDIAPUNCH INC/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

LOST CLASSICS

Cacophony

IN A TRULY ONE-OF-A-KIND INTERVIEW, **CACOPHONY**'S JASON BECKER AND MARTY FRIEDMAN LOOK BACK ON THE MAKING OF 1988'S *GO OFF!* — ONE OF THE EIGHTIES' MOST IN-YOUR-FACE GUITAR EXTRAVAGANZAS

By Andrew Daly

LOOKING BACK ON recording the scintillating *Go Off!* with Marty Friedman, Jason Becker, who was 18 when the album was released, says, "It was all special to us, especially now that we both know how precious and fleeting those times were."

Given Becker's ALS, one can understand the sentiment. But still, "precious" is an interesting way to define one of the more in-your-face guitar extravaganzas of the Eighties. "That album resulted from me being so inspired by working with Marty," Becker says. "For *Go Off!*, I had gotten better at writing and playing, and I was a lot more confident. We just were comfortable with each other. We were getting good at mixing our different flavors. I was able to give more to Go Off!"

By the time *Go Off!* dropped on Shrapnel Records in '88, it was the heart of the so-called "shred era," and Friedman and Becker had already recorded their first record as Cacophony, *Speed Metal Symphony* (1987), and two frenzied solo records in Friedman's *Dragon's Kiss* (1988) and Becker's *Perpetual Burn* (1988).

They'd learned a lot, and it showed on *Go Off!*, a record bred through dedication and sheer talent. "When we did shows or toured, it was definitely wilder," Becker says. "We never trashed hotel rooms or anything, though. It was weird for me; I never did drugs or drank. There was something in me that thought I didn't want to hurt my body. Like my lungs and brain couldn't take it. I always wanted to be in control of myself. Ironic, as now I have no control."

Regardless of its over-the-top nature, what *Go Off!* really represents is the supernatural bond between Becker and Friedman, leading to moments no one saw coming but definitely heard.

"At the end of 'Black Cat,' there is this pretty acoustic fingerpicking chord sequence by Jason," Friedman says. "The song was just supposed to fade out with him playing that by himself. The song was

complete, and we were listening before mixing and I was holding a guitar randomly plugged into a DI; I didn't know that guitar was live or recording. When Jason's ending part came up, I started playing a melody on top, not expecting to hear what I was playing through the monitors, but there it was."

The "it" in question was something Becker and Friedman will never forget. "I kept playing, and it was just a moment," Friedman said. "I never played over his part before, but here I was. It was the wee hours, way after midnight after one of many long sessions, and Jason's piece was like the tender arpeggios of a music box lullaby. The soft melody I was playing over it seemed so cozy and poignant, although neither of us planned for any melody there."

Becker adds: "When I recorded the outro for 'Black Cat' on an acoustic guitar, I got it in one take. Then, without any preparation, just to test the tone, Marty recorded a solo over it. [Producer] Steve Fontano and I said it was perfect. Marty wanted a little more time, but we talked him into his first take. It was just a beautiful, off-the-cuff moment."

"We looked at each other in disbelief and high-fived each other," Friedman says. "Not because 'This sounds like a hit!' or 'What an insane lick!' or 'People are gonna dig this!' but because we just experienced one of those rare magical moments while making music. I could have learned what I did and played it better. I could have tweaked the melody here and there, used a nicer-sounding guitar and amp setup — but documenting the actual magic that happened was more important to us than polishing it."

You recorded *Speed Metal Symphony* before *Go Off!* What did you learn about working together?

MARTY FRIEDMAN: *Speed Metal Symphony* was my baby, but I saw potential in Jason, so I had him play a lot of the harmonies and shoehorned him into a few places where he could shine. That album was Jason's first professional recording experience. After doing *Speed Metal Symphony*, I improved quite a bit, but it must be noted that Jason grew by leaps and bounds, literally at a savant level. Right after *Speed Metal Symphony*, he wrote and recorded *Perpetual Burn* at 18. In that short year and a half, he had evolved into an altogether different person/player. He was demonic.

JASON BECKER: I had gotten a lot better. *Speed Metal Symphony* was like school for me. I learned so much from Marty. That album was Marty's baby, but he was so kind as to include some of my ideas and make it a team effort. I didn't quite have my own distinct style. I was only 17, but I was very positive and probably pushed Marty to improve. We were best friends.

What were Shrapnel Records' expectations for Go Off!?

FRIEDMAN: The only pressure was that the label wanted good vocal songs. We did, too, but Jason and I were definitely not Elton John and Bernie Taupin. My lyrics were vomit-inducing, and Jason's lyrics… ahem… were why "Images" became an instrumental song. Peter Marrino did a really good job with what we provided him. I don't envy a singer trying to do his job between 64-measure guitar solos. I don't remember the budget, but we did move up to Fantasy Studios in Berkeley for *Go Off!*, which was a more prestigious facility than we had used before.

"Is it really a cult classic? Cool. I didn't know that. It was just so much fun being able to make music with my best friend"

BECKER: I don't think Mike Varney pressured us to do anything specific. Marty could correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't remember any budget increase or pressure. My recollection is that Mike Varney thought we were like the new innovative players, and he gave us control. Mike always had suggestions, but I remember feeling free to do what we wanted.

You recorded with Steve Fontano. How much freedom did you have?

FRIEDMAN: Jason and I were in complete control of the guitar work, and Steve took care of the overall sound, vocal arrangements and loads of embellishment ideas. I loved Steve. He is uber-talented, and I still use many of his catchphrases. We did provide some sick guitar work, but Steve reigned us in like a band so that "even girls could listen to us…" kind of. If anything on *Go Off!* resonates as being a good song and not just a guitar extravaganza, Steve is highly responsible.

BECKER: Steve was Mike Varney's main guy, and we loved working with him. He is very talented, musical, funny and fun. He got all the nice sounds, helped a little with arranging, mixed it, and we cracked each other up. Marty and I brought in our songs, and he made them sound good. With Shrapnel, we were free to do any crazy guitar stuff we wanted to do.

Did you intend to make *Go Off!* more accessible than Speed Metal Symphony?

BECKER: Marty and I wanted to be as well known as Whitesnake or Poison. We wanted it to be more accessible to normal people and guitar players. We wanted to be rock stars with pretty girls and rock fans coming to our shows.

FRIEDMAN: I got the intense and often dissonant *Speed Metal Symphony* off my chest, so with that piece of music firmly documented, I wanted to feature Jason and myself more equally and take on more of a band dynamic that wasn't there before.

Since you're both virtuoso guitarists and songwriters, was it challenging to find space?

FRIEDMAN: You are far too kind. Songwriting was our Achilles' heel. Our problem was we were shining too much almost all the time. There is only so much shining a listener can take. Any one song on *Go Off!* might have about one full album's worth of guitar work on it. It was like a "money shot compilation" of guitar solos. We knew listeners usually wanted a memorable song rather than an insane guitar solo or riff, but we wanted to be extreme, whether people liked it or not. At the time, that extremeness was a big minus, but that may be why the album is more appreciated now than it was then.

BECKER: That album was pretty satisfying, but I admit that after the tours of Japan and the U.S., I wanted to do more of my own music with more of my own guitar. After our tour, I remember Cacophony talking about doing another album, and it seemed less guitar-focused. I could be remembering wrong, but that is when I left Cacophony. We did another show after that at some Bay Area music magazine awards show. It was fun, and I questioned my decision to leave, but as life turned out, it was a good thing that I did.

During that tour, I was having the first symptoms of ALS. I went to Japan on my own and then joined David Lee Roth, all with a limp and weakness in my body. I remember calling Marty from the hotel in L.A. after getting the gig with Roth. Marty called me after joining Megadeth. It was quite cool. We were so happy for each other.

What songs presented the most significant challenges?

BECKER: My two songs, "Stranger" and "Images," took the most work because I hadn't written lyrics before. In the studio, Steve helped me polish my lyrics for "Stranger." I had lyrics for "Images," but when we were rehearsing the songs with our drummer, Deen Castronovo, and our singer, Peter Marrino, I got teased so badly! It was funny hearing Peter singing my silly words. Deen defended me and made me feel a lot better.

"We wanted to be rock stars with pretty girls and fans coming to our shows," Becker says

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FRIEDMAN: The title track was tricky. Jason and I played the weird intro together live, but in the studio, the high and low harmonies had to be "tight as a gnat's ass in a power dive," to use Steve Fontano's words. So Jason played them both. He nailed them, but it was a bitch to keep the tiny spaces clean between the phrases.

It would've been nice if Pro Tools existed back then. Edits were done with a razorblade and tape; you had to punch out of the record and in, and there was no quantizing, copy-and-pasting or auto-tuning. After recording in Pro Tools for so long after this, it blows me away how we did this ambitious stuff without it.

BECKER: I remember recording the intro to "Go Off!" I laid down my drum machine part to play over it in time. We couldn't get a guitar tone I was happy with because if I had any distortion on it, it would feedback in all the little spaces. I had to use an almost clean tone, which wasn't cool, especially to Marty. He didn't want anything sounding like jazz. We worked it to sound okay. In that intro, I played both harmonies, but he came up with the harmony part on the spot and told me what to play. He is quite a musical genius.

You both were very young. Did either of you have red-light fever?

BECKER: That is funny. No — we didn't have any of that. We didn't think about what others would think; we just wanted to please ourselves. Marty had total confidence in his whole unique musical vision, and that rubbed off on me. I started thinking I was the man, too. When we first started, I wondered if it was as good as our previous albums. He said, "Don't worry, it's great." I relaxed and enjoyed it.

> "We shared gear and borrowed gear from our guitar students, who usually had better gear than we did."

FRIEDMAN: There was no time for nerves or crises, as we were on a tight budget with lots to get done. If you have a great engineer like Fontano on board, it allows you to have intense focus on the music. He was a godsend.

When not working to record the record, how did you two blow off steam?

FRIEDMAN: We would argue about football, Jason would cream me at chess, and we'd spend lots of time listening to, analyzing, and marveling at music we liked. Philip Glass comes to mind. Nightlife and wild antics didn't come until we went on tour in Japan and North America.

BECKER: We were pretty chill. Getting to play our own music was the greatest release. We watched football sometimes. We had fun going to Telegraph Avenue. in Berkeley with Marty's girlfriend Laurie and my brother Ehren. We would find new music at Rasputin, Leopold's, and Tower Records, like Philip Glass, Kitaro and all kinds of weird classical composers.

I remember one time we all went into some kind of rock clothing store. A guy who worked there started telling us about a great band called Cacophony. He saw a show, and the two guitar players were great. We were trying not to crack up. I asked which guitar player was his favorite of the two; he said he couldn't pick. We never did tell him who we were.

While recording, did you share gear?

FRIEDMAN: We shared gear and borrowed gear from our guitar students, who usually had better gear than we did. We started to have a few endorsements, so there was a lot of new gear coming into the studio, too. I used my first Jackson Kelly and a few Carvin guitars. Few, if any pedals. No idea about amps.

BECKER: If I remember right, we used the same kind of Carvin amps. Marty could correct me if I'm wrong. Maybe we used Marty's student's Marshall amp like we had on our solo albums. I think we used the Carvin guitars from the cover of the album. We didn't have to consciously work on sounding different. We could use the same gear and sound like ourselves.

***Go Off!* was kind of over the top, even for the time, but it's also a snapshot of the era. It didn't get its due then, but it's a cult classic now.**

FRIEDMAN: Kind of? It was beyond over the top! I do agree that it's a snapshot of the era, though. We looked like every other hair band at the time and thank God we did. Girls expecting glam rock came to our shows. We fooled everyone when we toured the U.S. and Japan. We looked like Poison, but we shook our asses in 5/4 time.

BECKER: Is it really a cult classic? Cool. I didn't know that. It was just so much fun being able to make music with my best friend. I'm so grateful for those times. I was healthy, happy, young, and full of creative energy. Thank you to Mike Varney for that opportunity.

"I especially love Robert Fripp and King Crimson," Mathieu Ricou says

NICOLE SHAADE

Lizzard

FIVE ALBUMS IN, THE EUROPEAN ART-ROCK TRIO ARE STILL SEARCHING FOR NEW WAYS TO EXPAND THEIR SOUND

By Amit Sharma

THE FIRST THING you'll notice when you hear Lizzard's new album, *Mesh*, is that they're a power trio with an emphasis on the word "power." There's nothing one-dimensional or minimalist about this latest collection of songs — which, at times, sounds like nearly twice as many musicians locked in a room together and going for sonic gold. Welcoming new shades of prog and shoegaze into their kaleidoscopic wall of noise, the beguiling layers of ambiences will appeal to just about any kind of listener.

"We're really into bands like Radiohead, Gojira and Tool," says singer/guitarist Mathieu Ricou, who is based in France and works with a British rhythm section. "I especially love Robert Fripp and King Crimson. We toured with Adrian Belew once, which was a huge deal for me. Seeing him do all that crazy shit was incredible."

So how exactly does a band with only one guitarist manage to sound as rich, deep and complex as other groups with twice as many? There are a few tricks, says Ricou, who uses his Boss DD-3 Hold function to create live loops, and pitch shifters like the Electro-Harmonix POG to add textural weight, while also encouraging his bass player to dial in extra distortion where necessary. "The short loop time on the DD-3 is actually why I love it," Ricou adds. "I embrace the limitation. It forces you to find something that works, you can't just go crazy or it will fall apart."

For the latest recordings, the frontman used a Fryette SIG:X head going into an Engl cabinet via his POG, Morley wah and ZVEX Fuzz Factory, as well as an Eventide H9 in the loop handling reverbs and a DD7 for his regular delays. The choice of amp was inspired by Page Hamilton of Helmet, who has used a Fryette Pitbull Ultra-Lead extensively over the years. Perhaps the most interesting thing about the rig is the guitar in Ricou's hands, built by a local luthier by the name of Christophe Dufour, owner of Custom Design Guitars.

"He does everything exactly the way I ask," Ricou says. "I don't use pickup selectors, so I asked him to fit a blend knob like a bass. It gives me more tonal options, with a Van Zandt single-coil in the neck and a DiMarzio Tone Zone in the bridge. I hope I don't sound too French when I say this, but we already know how most typical guitars sound. Why stick to someone else's palette? Ultimately, my tone is pure. All I want to hear is the hands, the strings and the valves."

The Ultimate Guitar Shop

Christie's Jeff Beck Auction offered a revealing look at numerous iconic instruments from the legendary guitarist's entire career — from the Yardbirds to Johnny Depp

STORY BY CHRIS GILL

MOST SUCCESSFUL GUITARISTS inevitably become guitar collectors, eventually amassing dozens or even hundreds of instruments during their careers. Many famous and acclaimed guitarists have owned some of the world's most impressive collections, such as legendary veterans Eric Clapton, David Gilmour, Mark Knopfler and Pete Townshend, as well as relative newcomers like Joe Bonamassa and Slash, who acquired some of the rarest and most highly desirable vintage instruments.

These hoarding proclivities were expertly spoofed in the timeless rock mockumentary comedy *This Is Spinal Tap* when Nigel Tufnel showed off his guitar collection to director Marty Di Bergi and refused to let Di Bergi even look at a mint, unplayed Seafoam Green 1963 Fender Bass VI that still had its hang tags. But even though actor Christopher Guest based Tufnel on Jeff Beck, this was one of the few scenarios that wasn't very much like Beck at all. Beck certainly owned more than his fair share of guitars, but his collection was more about well-worn, used and abused tools of his trade than untouched trophies, consisting almost entirely of items that he played on stage and in the studio on a

> **"His collection was more about used and abused tools of his trade"**

JEFF BECK GROUP
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nearly daily basis.

Recently, Beck's wife Sandra felt that his guitars had sat idle too long and she decided that they belong in new homes with players who can continue to make music with them. On January 22, 2025, about 90 guitars and string instruments and various amps, pedals and other music wares from Beck's collection — a total of 130 lots — were auctioned by Christie's in London.

"These guitars were his great love," said Sandra Beck. "But after almost two years of his passing it's time to part with them as Jeff wished. After some hard thinking, I decided they need to be shared, played and loved again. It is a massive wrench to part with them but I know Jeff wanted for me to share this love. I hope the future guitarists who acquire these items are able to move closer to the genius who played them."

The variety of gear in the auction covered the guitarist's entire career from his early days in the Yardbirds through his final shows with Johnny Depp. In addition to truly iconic guitars like his 1959 "Yardburst" and 1954 "Oxblood" Les Pauls, his custom "Tele-Gib" assembled by Seymour Duncan, a 1954 Strat gifted to Beck by Steve Marriott and various prototypes of his Fender Jeff Beck Stratocaster signature model, the auction also included numerous surprises like the Chapman Stick he was seen playing in the late Seventies, various acoustic guitars and Fender basses that he wasn't known for playing, a 1957 Telecaster signed by the rhythm guitarist for Gene Vincent and His Blue Caps Paul Peek and several lap steels. Several of the more unusual and obscure instruments were likely gifts given to Beck over the last two decades of his life.

"Beck's wife Sandra felt that his guitars had sat idle too long"

Two highly coveted Klon Centaur pedals went up for bidding as well as the custom J. Rockett Archer "klone" pedals that replaced them in his rig (a very strong endorsement if there ever was one) along with individual pedals, entire pedal board rigs and even custom Marshall floor wedges. Numerous Marshall, Fender tweed and Magnatone "Becktone" amps were also in the mix, along with the Fender Princeton II and Twin Reverb II amps he used to record 1989's *Guitar Shop*.

What follows are a few highlights of the most famous and fascinating items from Christie's Jeff Beck auction.

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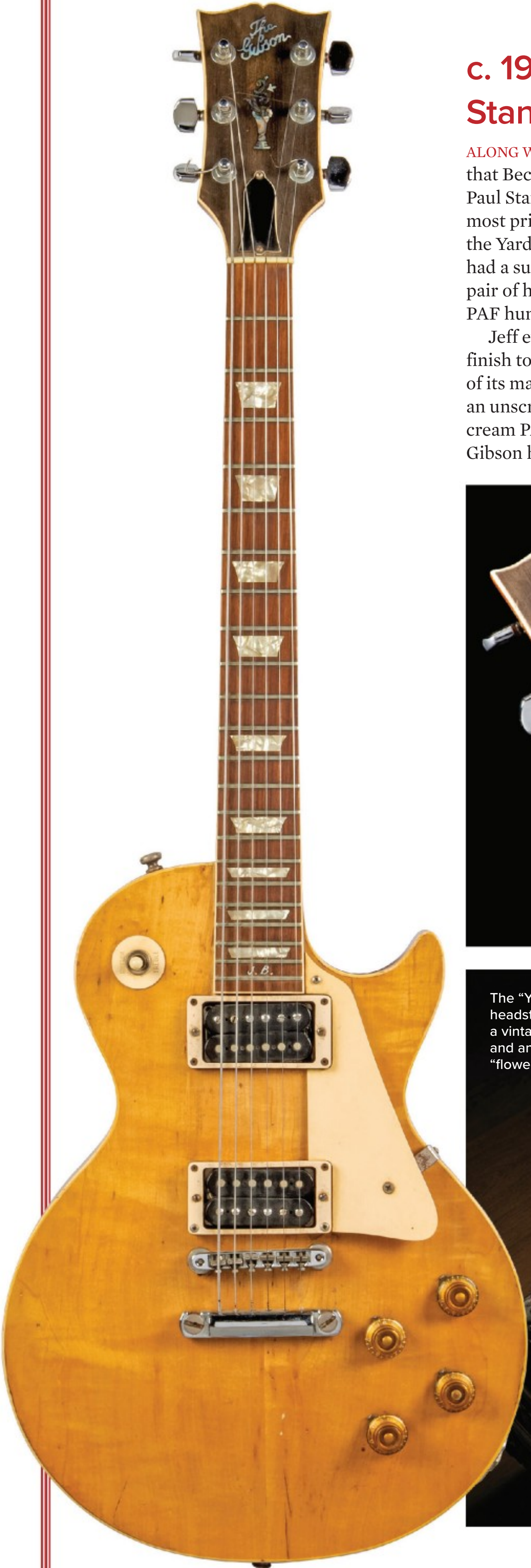
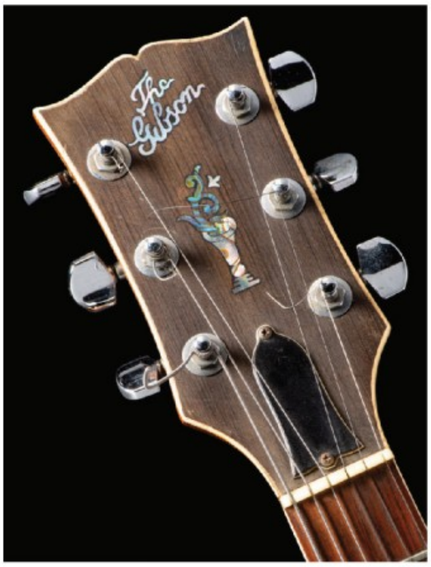


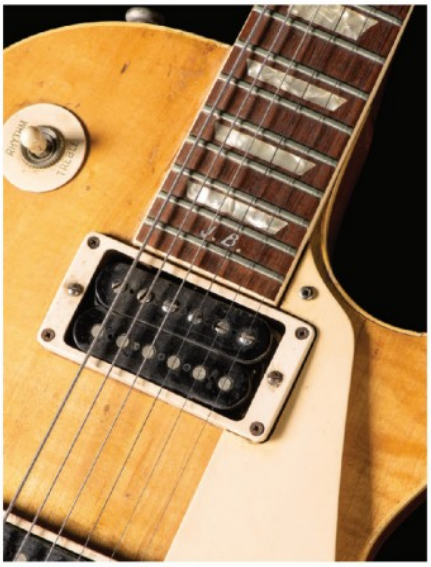
c. 1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard ("Yardburst")

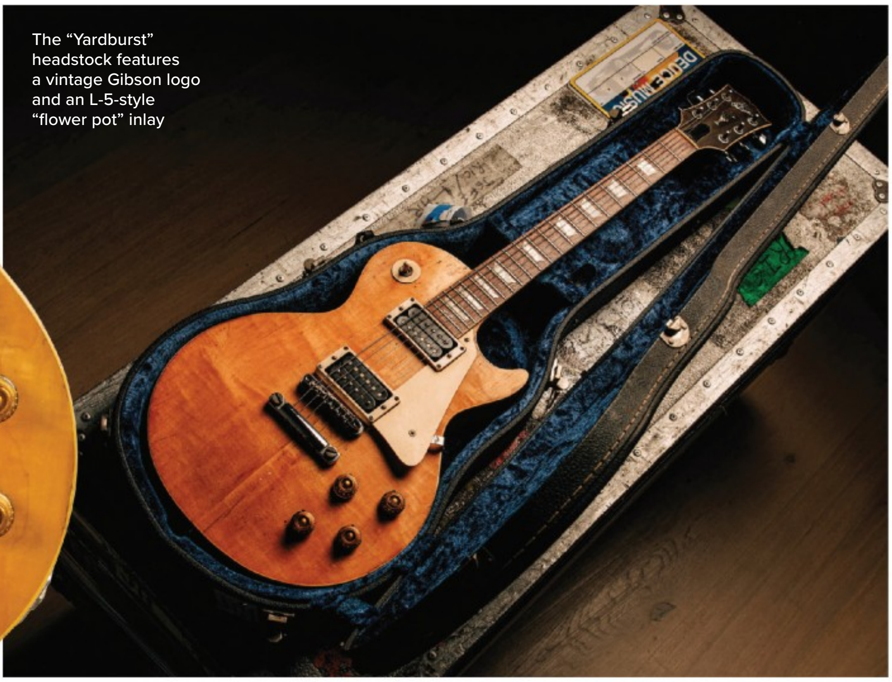
ALONG WITH THE Fifties Fender Esquire that Beck bought from John Maus, this Les Paul Standard was one of the guitarist's most prized acquisitions while he was with the Yardbirds in the mid Sixties. It originally had a sunburst finish, black pickguard and a pair of highly coveted double-cream bobbin PAF humbuckers.

Jeff eventually stripped off the sunburst finish to expose the natural grain and color of its maple top. During the late Sixties, an unscrupulous repairman replaced the cream PAFs with a pair of later-model Gibson humbuckers, which upset Beck and drove him to buy another 1959 Les Paul from future Cheap Trick guitarist Rick Nielsen. In the early Seventies after he broke the Yardburst's neck, a craftsman built a new neck featuring a vintage Gibson logo and L-5-style "flower pot" inlay on the headstock and the initials "J.B." between the 21st and 22nd frets.

This guitar appeared on numerous important Jeff Beck recordings during the Sixties, including the Yardbirds' *Roger the Engineer/Over Under Sideways Down* album, the Jeff Beck Group's *Truth* album and the "Beck's Bolero" single.







The "Yardburst" headstock features a vintage Gibson logo and an L-5-style "flower pot" inlay

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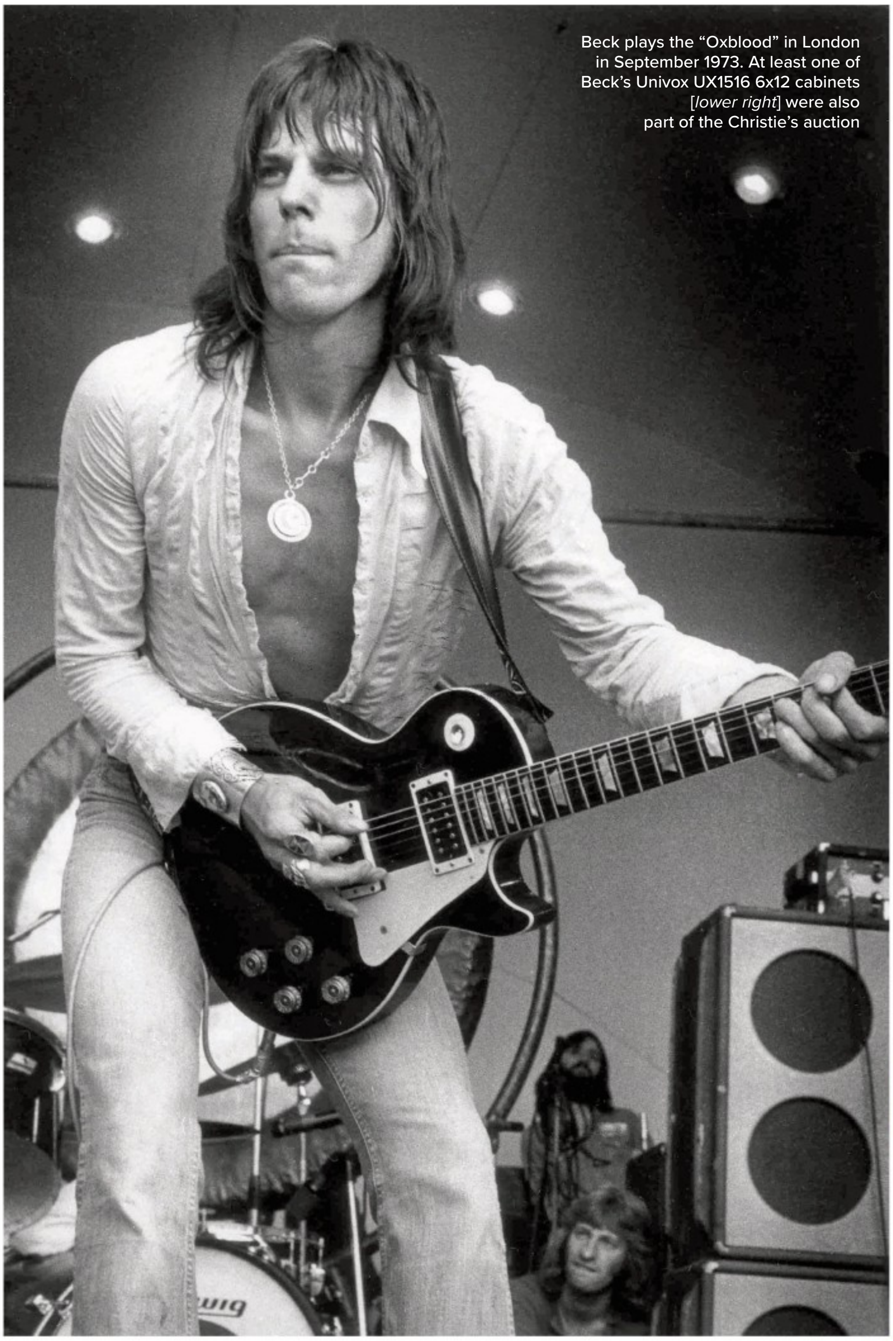
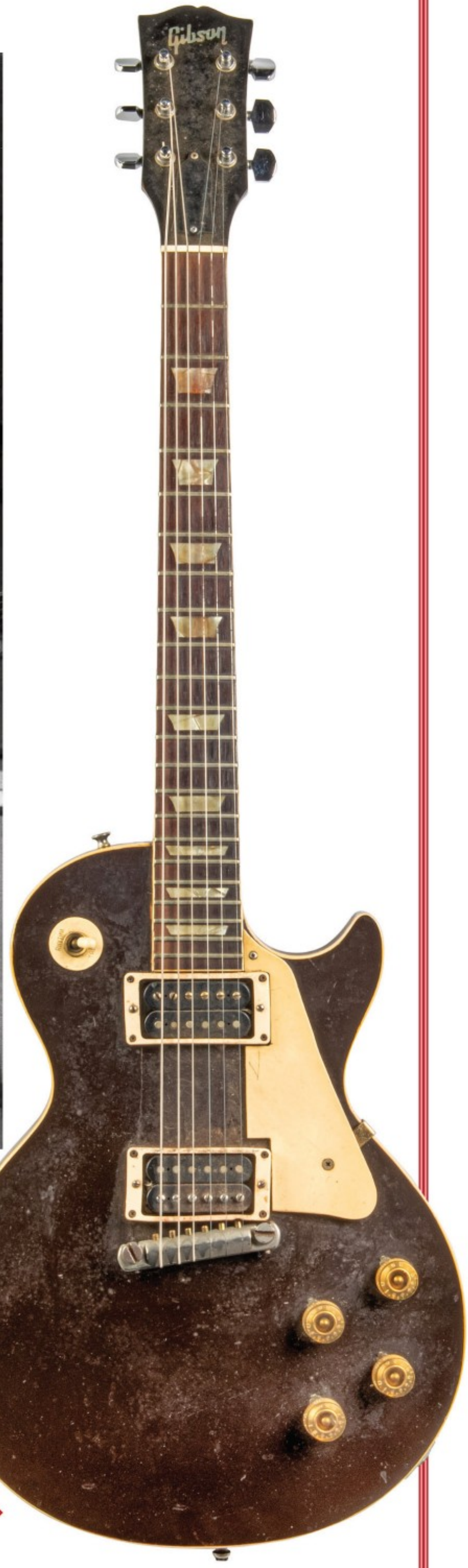


Beck plays the "Oxblood" in London in September 1973. At least one of Beck's Univox UX1516 6x12 cabinets [*lower right*] were also part of the Christie's auction



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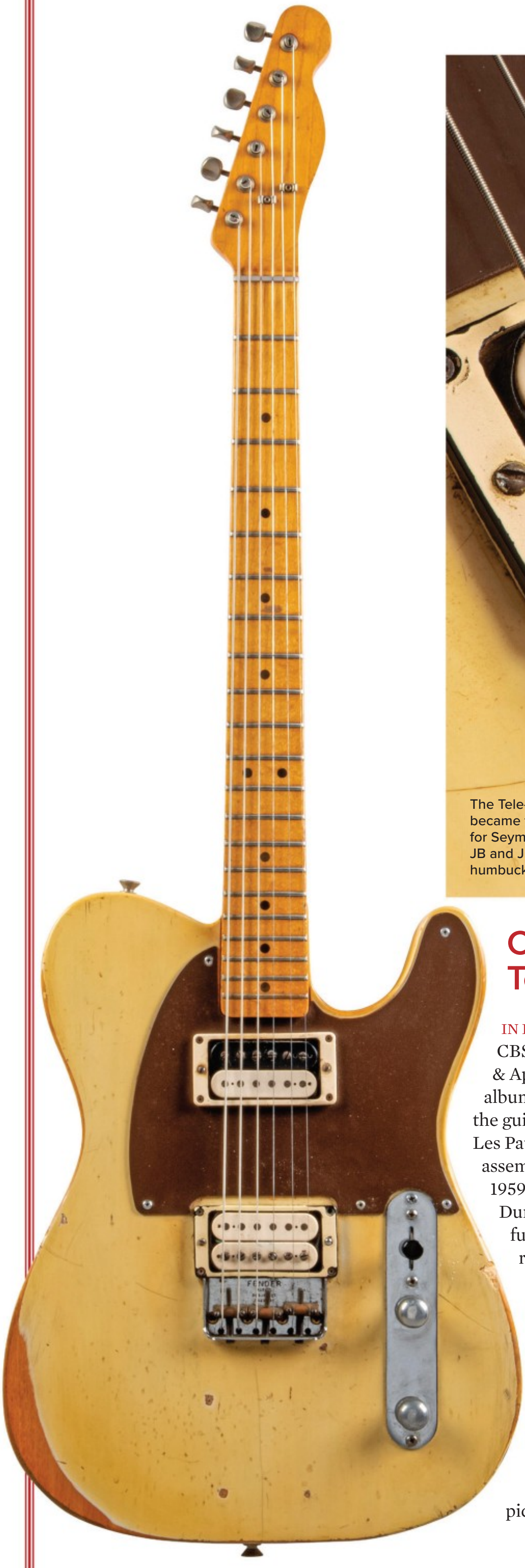
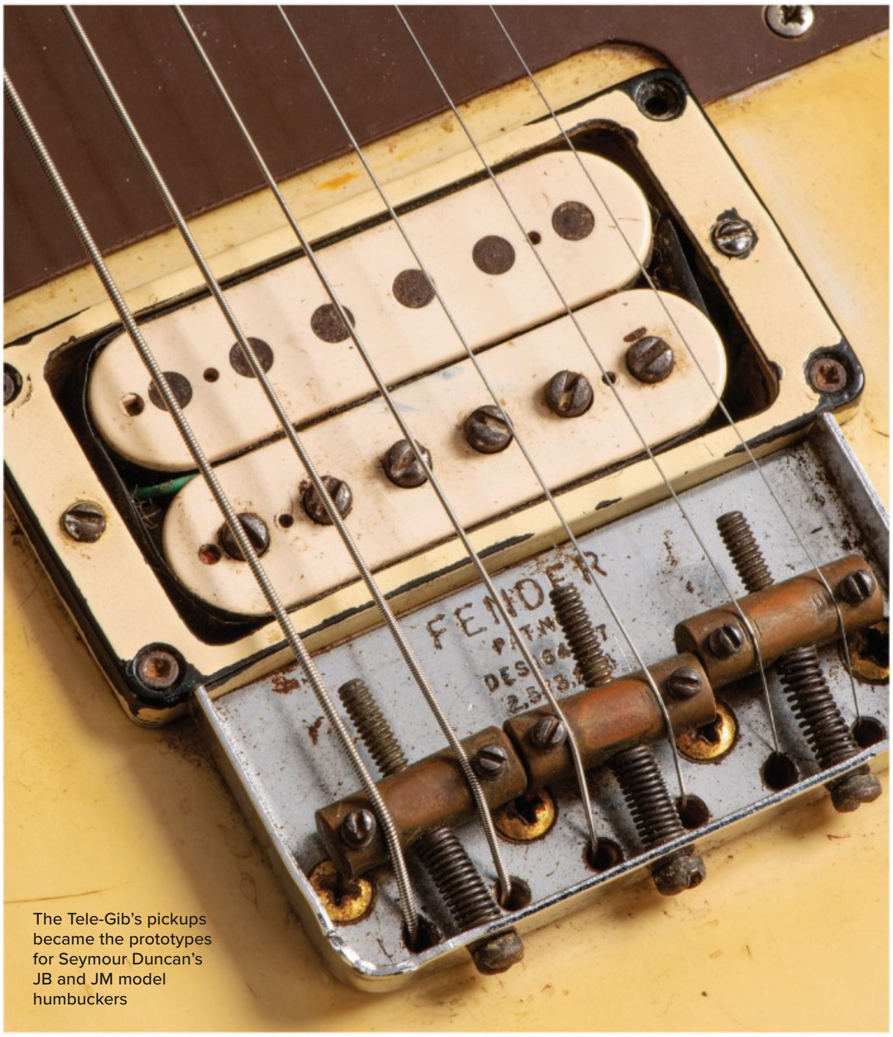
1954 Gibson Les Paul Model ("Oxblood")

THIS GUITAR ENJOYS immortal iconic status, thanks to its depiction on the cover of Beck's best-selling album, *Blow by Blow*. Jeff bought this 1954 Les Paul from a fan and friend named Buddy Davis in Memphis in November 1972. The Les Paul had already undergone several modifications when Beck acquired it, which included the replacement of its original P90 single-coil pickups with Gibson humbuckers and a refinish job with a distinctive deep dark brown color that inspired its "oxblood" nickname.

Beck was photographed frequently on stage with the oxblood Les Paul with Beck, Bogert & Appice, and it remained his main instrument through the mid Seventies, featuring prominently on his *Blow by Blow* album and 1975 tour with John McLaughlin. In 2007, Gibson made a highly detailed limited-edition replica of the Oxblood Les Paul, and one of the prototypes and a production model are also in the auction.





The Tele-Gib's pickups became the prototypes for Seymour Duncan's JB and JM model humbuckers

Custom Tele-Gib 1959 **Fender Telecaster**

IN EARLY 1974 when Jeff was in CBS Studios working on Beck, Bogert & Appice's ill-fated second studio album, Seymour Duncan approached the guitarist with a custom Telecaster/ Les Paul hybrid instrument that he had assembled. It started as a butchered 1959 Tele with a rosewood neck, but Duncan routed out larger cavities for full-size humbucking pickups and replaced the battered rosewood fretboard with a maple fretboard and installed Gibson Les Paul frets. Duncan cut an early Fifties Tele bridge in half to accommodate a bridge humbucker, and he cut a new pickguard.

Perhaps the most important element of Duncan's custom Tele/Les Paul hybrid is its pickups. The zebra bobbin neck and dual-cream bridge humbuckers were originally broken PAFs that Duncan salvaged from a 1959 Flying V that once belonged to Lonnie Mack. Duncan rewound the pickups, in the process creating the prototypes for his JB and JM model humbuckers. The finished guitar was nicknamed the "Tele-Gib" for its blending of Telecaster and Gibson features.

Duncan traded the Tele-Gib for Beck's iconic Yardbirds Fender Esquire, which Beck bought from John Maus of the Walker Brothers in the summer of 1965. Beck didn't seem to mind the trade (at first) and later that year he used the Tele-Gib while recording *Blow by Blow*, most notably playing it on "Cause We've Ended As Lovers." Beck also appeared on stage with this guitar during his 1981 performances alongside Eric Clapton for *The Secret Policeman's Other Ball* shows and subsequent concert film.

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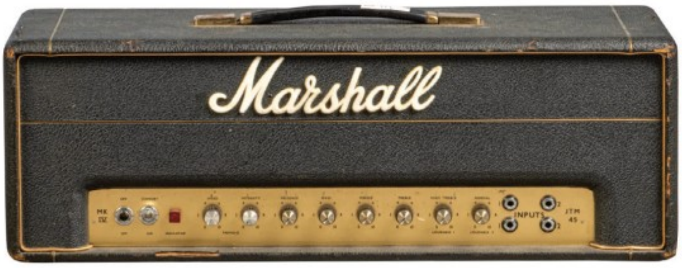
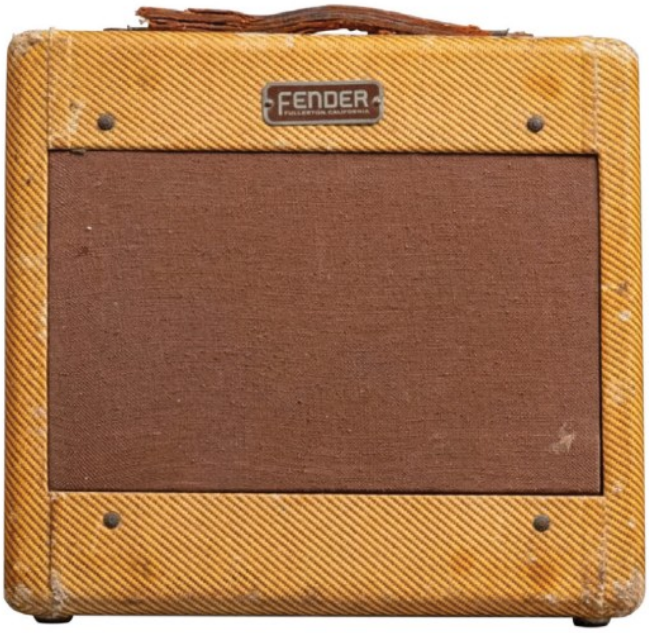


c. 1966-67 Marshall Model 1987 JTM45 MK IV Super Tremolo

IF YOU LOOK closely at photos of Beck's early concerts with the Jeff Beck Group in 1968 and 1969, you'll probably notice Beck plugged into one or more Marshall heads with eight control knobs instead of the usual six. These were Super Tremolo heads, and the two extra knobs controlled the tremolo effect's speed and intensity settings.

This Marshall Super Tremolo head is an unusual and rare early example, housed in a "small box" cabinet and marked JTM45 and MK IV on the front panel. Typically, the JTM45 MK IV designation was seen on the chassis for the Marshall combo model known as the "Bluesbreaker" combo that Eric Clapton used to record the "Beano" album with John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers. It's highly possible that this is the amp that Beck used in the studio to record tracks for the *Truth* album in May 1968.



1953 Fender Champion 600

ALTHOUGH BECK IS usually associated with using loud Marshall stacks on stage like the ones he was seen with in the late Sixties with the Jeff Beck Group, he often used much smaller amps in the studio. One can't get much smaller or more primitive than the 1953 Fender Champion 600 seen here, but surprisingly this was his main amp while recording his 2010 *Emotion & Commotion* album. During this period Beck even performed concerts using small 15-watt Fender Pro Junior 1x10 combos, with his Marshalls only appearing for show.

Beck in action with the GS-500 in Tokyo, December 1978

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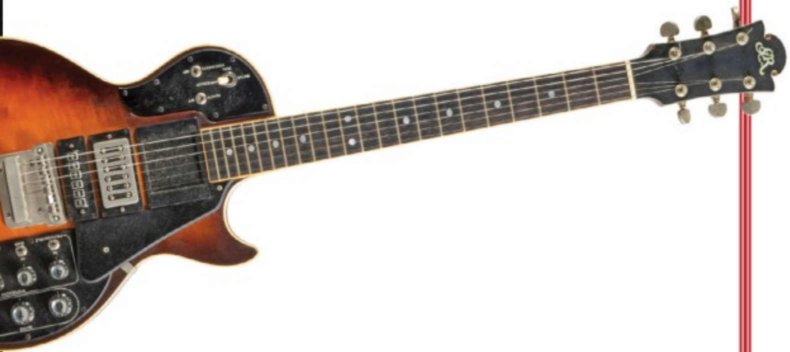
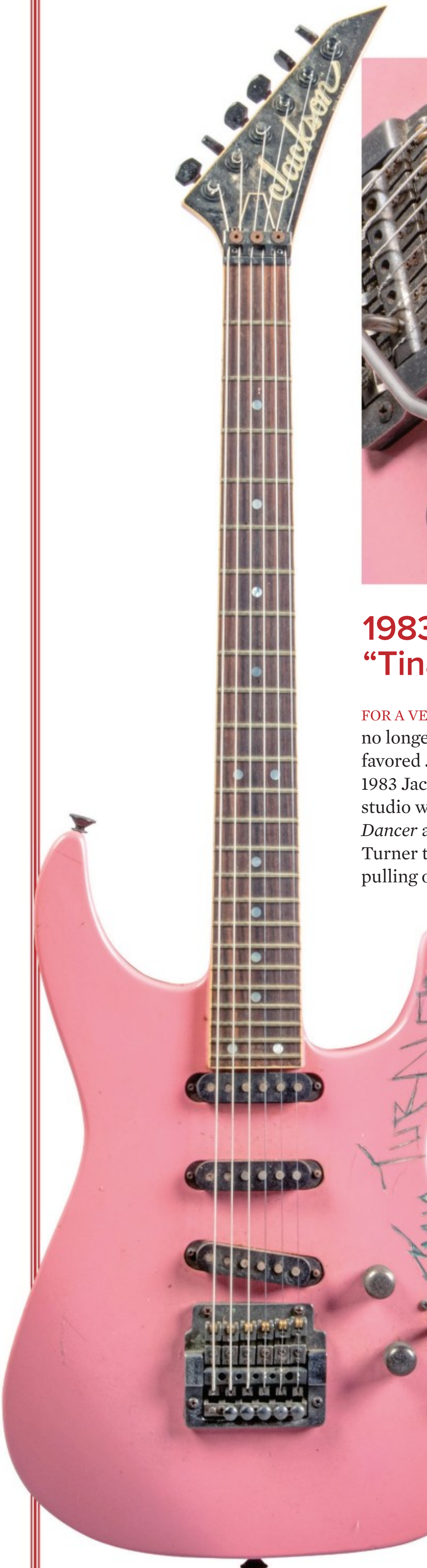
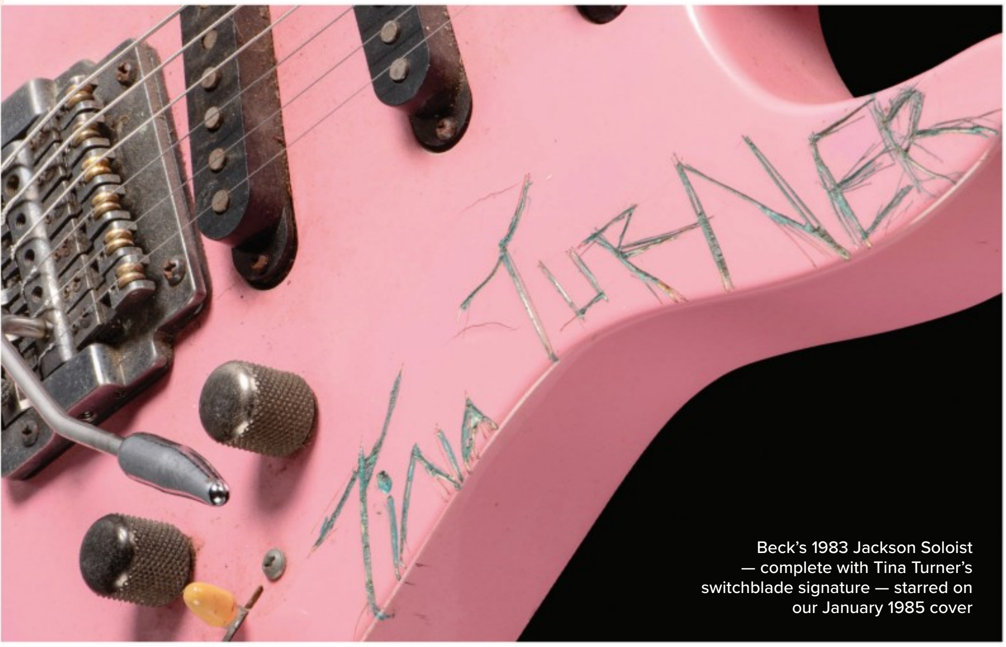


1977 Roland GS-500 Guitar Synthesizer Controller

ALTHOUGH BECK HAS seemed like a staunch traditionalist and even a minimalist at numerous points of his career, he could also be wildly adventurous with his gear. One example is the Roland GS-500 Guitar Synthesizer Controller seen here, which appeared on Jeff Beck's 1978 tour in Japan. This guitar, built by Japan's famed Fujigen Gakki workshop, controlled a GR-500 guitar synthesizer, which is not included in the auction. During this period Beck was heavily inspired by Jan Hammer's guitar-like synth work, so perhaps he adopted the Roland guitar synth to make his guitar sound even more like Hammer. His guitar synth work can be heard on bootlegs from the 1978 Japan tour where his band included the impressive lineup of Stanley Clarke (bass), Tony Hymas (keyboards) and Simon Phillips (drums).

➜





Beck's 1983 Jackson Soloist — complete with Tina Turner's switchblade signature — starred on our January 1985 cover

1983 Jackson Soloist "Tina Turner"

FOR A VERY brief period in the mid Eighties, Beck was no longer a Strat cat or a Les Paul man but rather he favored Jackson super strat models, like this hot pink 1983 Jackson Soloist. Beck brought this guitar to the studio when he guested on Tina Turner's *Private Dancer* album. At the end of the sessions, Beck asked Turner to autograph the guitar, and she obliged by pulling out a switchblade and deeply scratching her signature into its top so it would be a permanent addition.

Beck also played this guitar at several ARMS benefit concerts and while recording "People Get Ready," his reunion single with Rod Stewart. ➔

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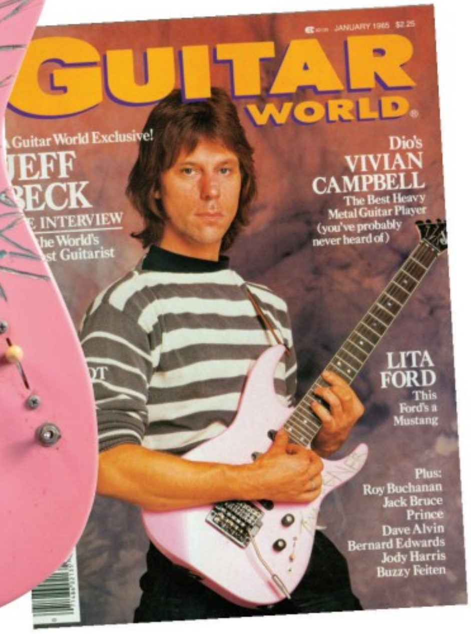
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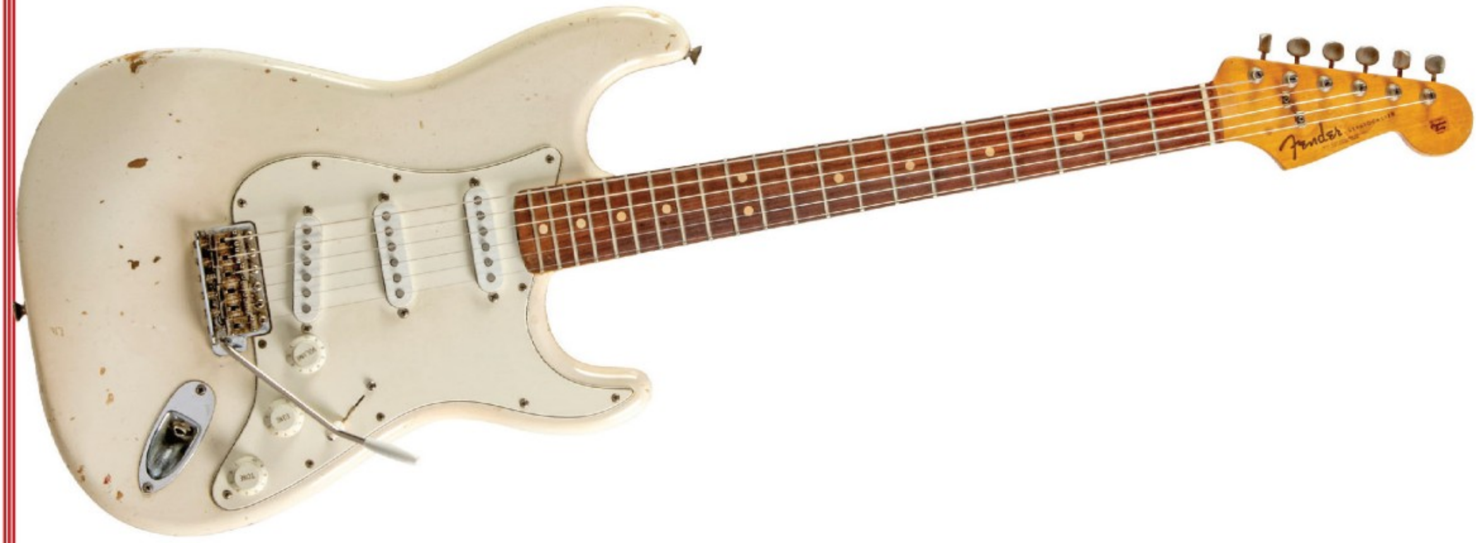


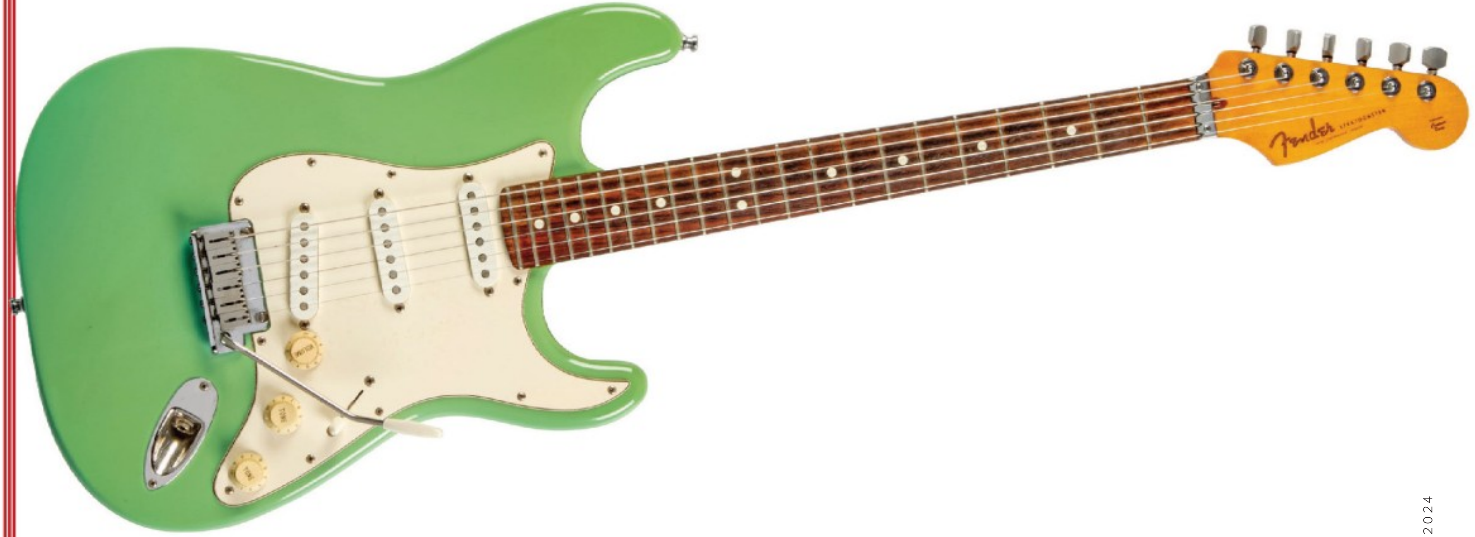
C. 1960 Olympic White Fender Stratocaster

AN OLYMPIC WHITE Strat is probably the guitar most closely associated with Jeff Beck. His first one was a brand-new model that he played during the early Seventies. While he was touring with John McLaughlin in 1975, Beck loaned McLaughlin a Gibson Les Paul Deluxe after McLaughlin's famous custom double-neck Rex Bogue was mysteriously broken in two. In repayment for the favor, McLaughlin bought Beck a mid-Sixties Olympic White Strat from Norman's Rare Guitars. This is allegedly the white Strat seen on the cover of Beck's 1976 *Wired* album.

Unfortunately, the McLaughlin Strat was stolen after Beck absentmindedly left it in an open-top hot rod while he dashed in and out of the Soho London nightclub Ronnie Scott's. Beck bought a similar replacement, but that was stolen too by shifty airline baggage handlers in the U.S. while he was on tour. Beck promptly bought a third replacement, which is the 1960 model seen here.

This is the same guitar seen in photos of Beck's 1978 Japan tour with Stanley Clarke where it had a black pickguard with individual on/off switches for each pickup, which were Schecter models wound by Tom Anderson. That pickguard is still with the guitar but with Seymour Duncan Quarter Pound pickups, along with a white pickguard with custom pickups that Duncan gave to Beck in 1995. The pickups and pickguard currently on the guitar are its stock Sixties parts.

This 1960 Strat appeared on several Beck albums over the years, including *Crazy Legs* (1993).



1990 Fender Jeff Beck Signature Stratocaster prototype #2

ALTHOUGH BECK WAS seen on his 1989 tour playing several custom Fender Strat Plus models that were precursors to his signature model, the very first official Jeff Beck Signature Stratocasters were not delivered to Jeff until early 1990 while he was in the studio working on Jon Bon Jovi's first solo album. One of those prototypes was a Seafoam Green model that became Jeff's main Strat through his 1995 tour with Carlos Santana, and it featured Little Richard's autograph scratched on its top similar to Tina Turner's autograph. This prototype is #2 and it is almost identical to Beck's favored "Little Richard" guitar.

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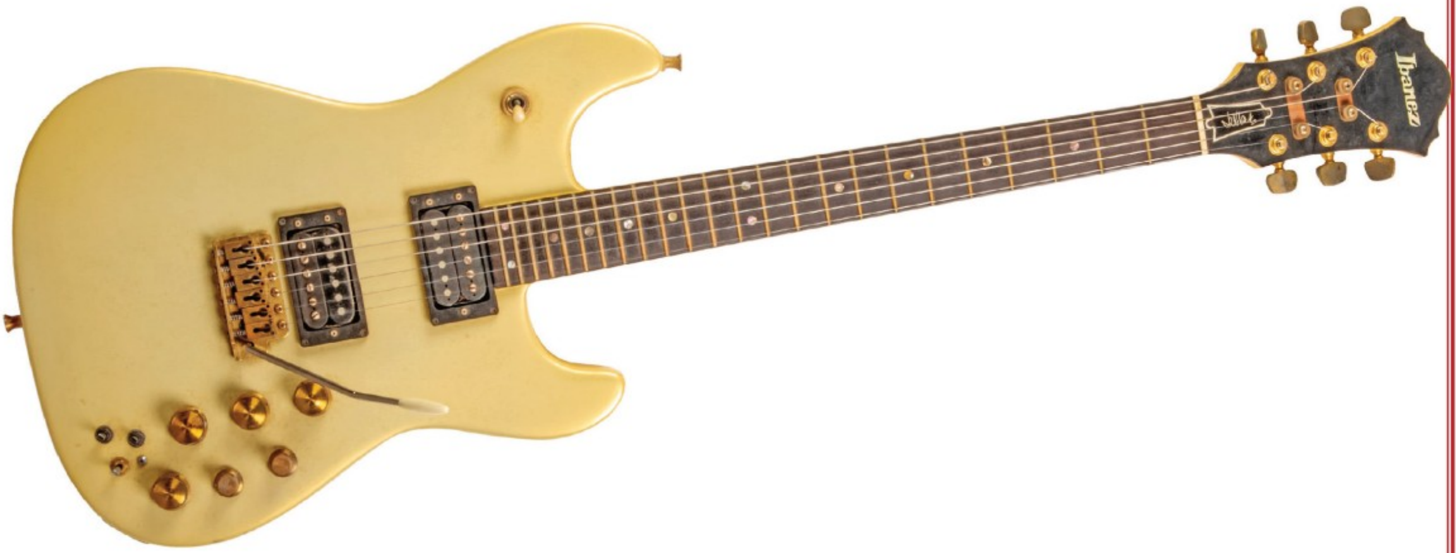
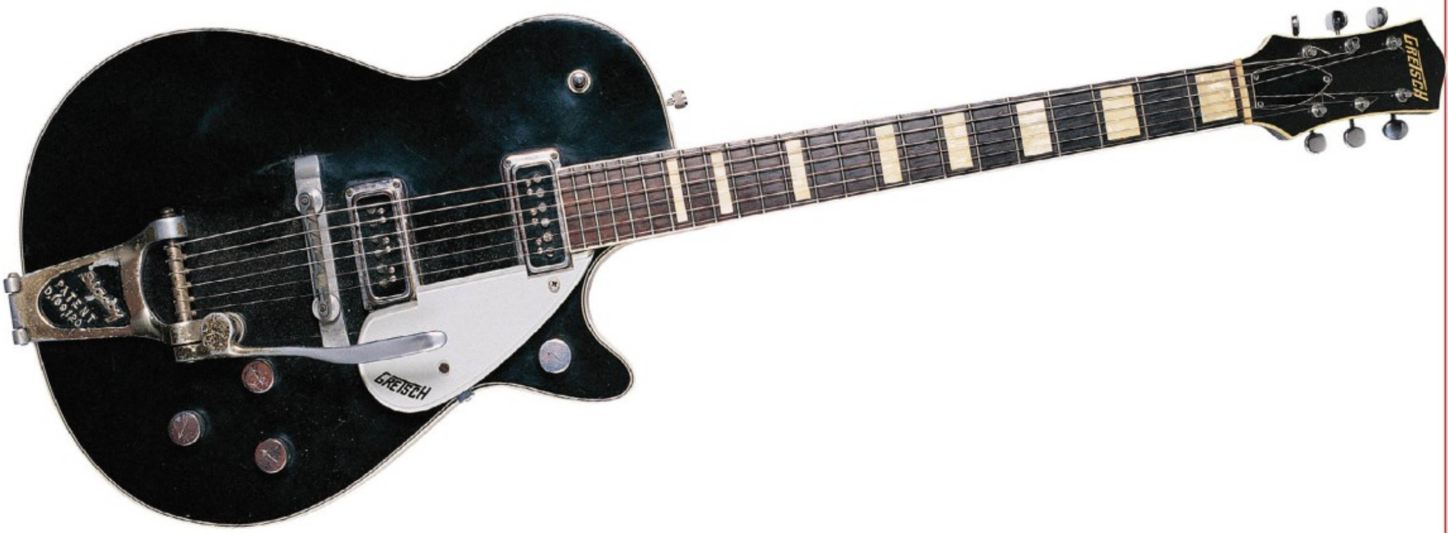


1980 Ibanez Jeff Beck Signature prototype

WHEN BECK TOURED Japan in 1978, numerous Japanese companies approached him about collaborating on a signature model. Two unique Greco guitars given to Jeff in 1978 are part of the auction, but even more fascinating are nine Ibanez guitars that include a "limited edition" variant of an MC-400 Musician model and eight prototypes built during 1979 and 1980 that reveal Ibanez's various and persistent (but ultimately futile) attempts to woo Mr. Beck.

The 1980 prototype seen here is from the very last run of prototypes made in November of that year before Beck ultimately nixed the project. With its Fender-style tremolo, unorthodox roller string trees that pre-dated the Wilkinson roller nut he favored about a decade later, pair of humbucking pickups, set neck and white finish, it probably came the closest of Ibanez's numerous attempts to make a Fender/Gibson hybrid that met Beck's demands. However, the relatively complicated controls, which included coil-tap and phase switches, a built-in preamp and active EQ, never seemed to appeal much to Jeff.



1956 Gretsch 6128 Duo-Jet

ONE OF THE greatest revelations of the Christie's auction was being able to finally see the progression of Gretsch guitars that Beck purchased while he pursued the sounds of his childhood guitar hero, Cliff Gallup of Gene Vincent and His Blue Caps. Gallup's ax was a 1956 Duo Jet with a fixed Bigsby vibrato, but those are as rare as hens' teeth. Beck did finally manage to get an exact dead ringer in late 1992, but alas, this was just after he had completed his Gallup tribute album, *Crazy Legs*.

Other Gretsch guitars in the auction include the 1972 Roc Jet that was his first failed attempt at the Gallup sound, a 1955 Duo Jet with a swivel-arm Bigsby purchased in 1984 that was pretty close — and that Beck used on *Crazy Legs* — and a red 1963 Jet Firebird that is the same exact year and model as Malcolm Young's number one guitar.

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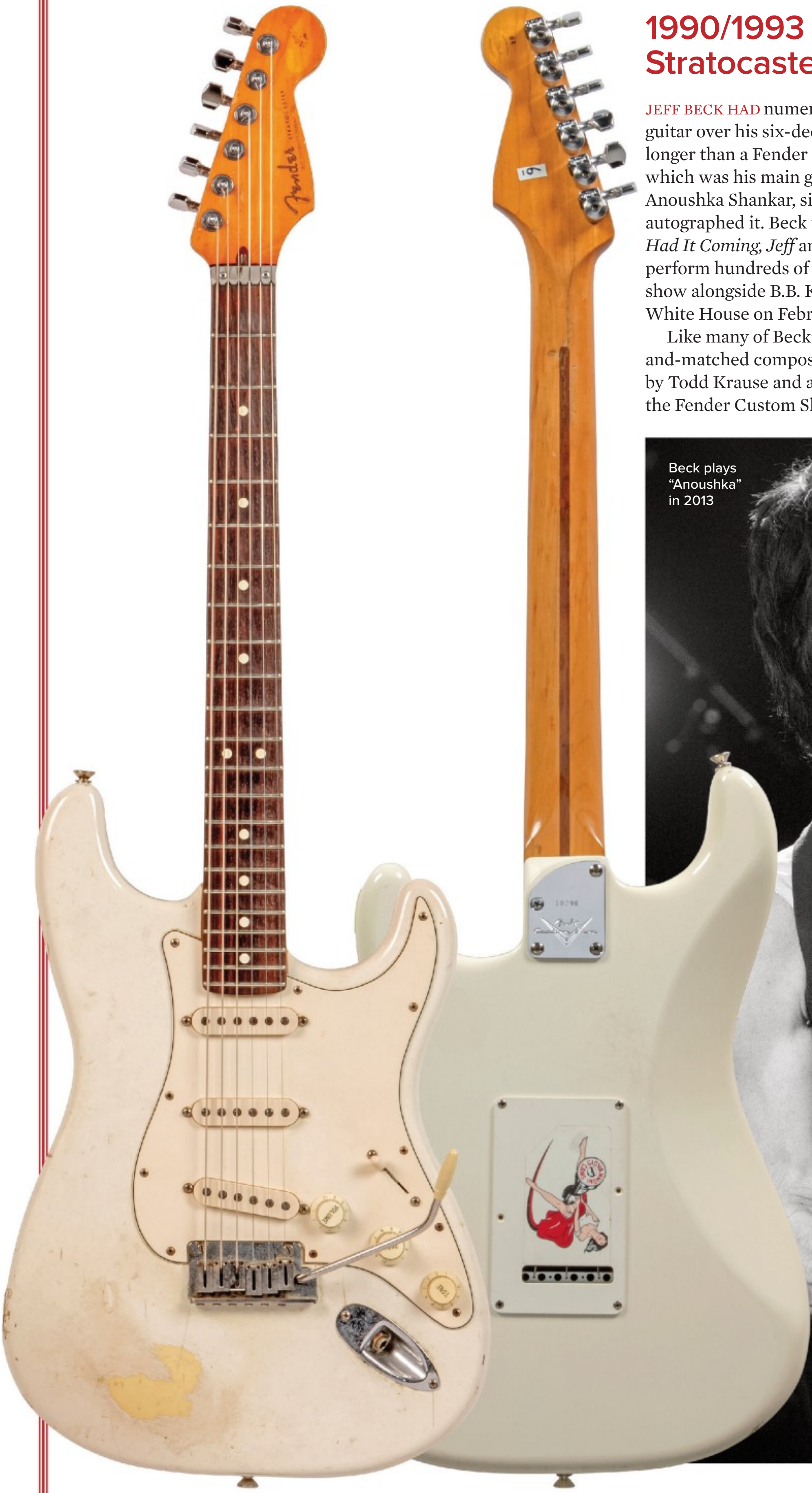
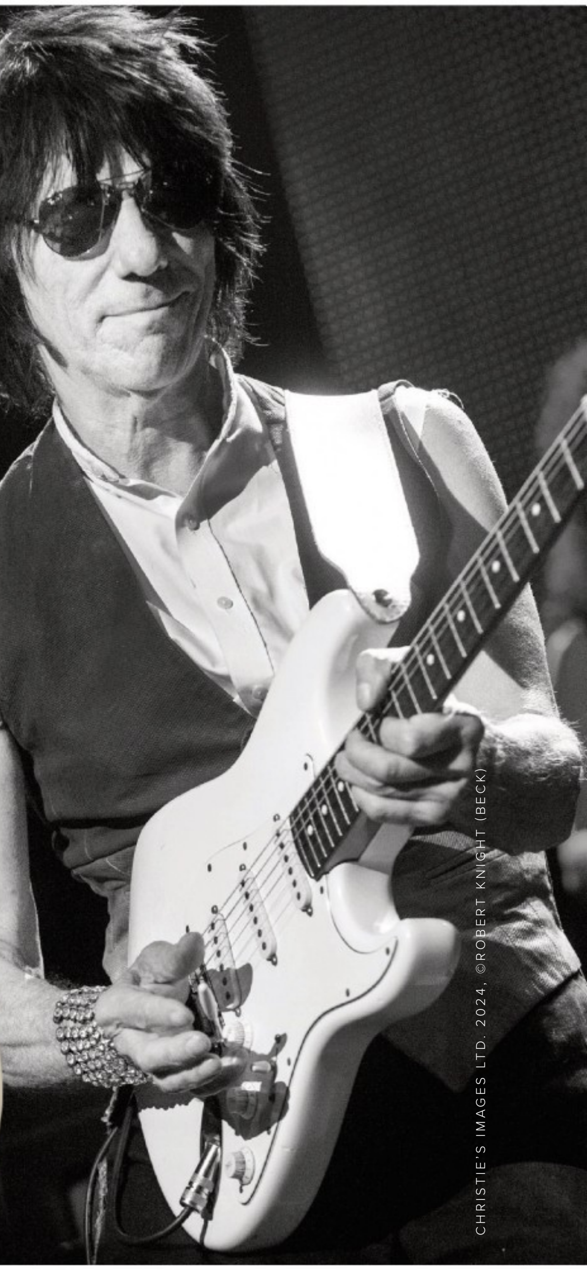


1990/1993 Fender Custom Shop Stratocaster "Anoushka"

JEFF BECK HAD numerous instruments that he considered his main guitar over his six-decade career, but none sustained that status longer than a Fender Custom Shop Strat nicknamed "Anoushka," which was his main guitar for 16 years. It earned its nickname when Anoushka Shankar, sitar virtuoso and daughter of Ravi Shankar, autographed it. Beck used this guitar to record the *Who Else!, You Had It Coming, Jeff* and *Emotion & Commotion* albums and to perform hundreds of concerts, including the Red, White & Blues show alongside B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Mick Jagger and others at the White House on February 21, 2012, in front of President Obama.

Like many of Beck's favorite Fenders, "Anoushka" is a mixed-and-matched composite of parts, with the body dating to 1990 built by Todd Krause and a neck from 1993 made by J.W. Black, both of the Fender Custom Shop.



Beck plays "Anoushka" in 2013

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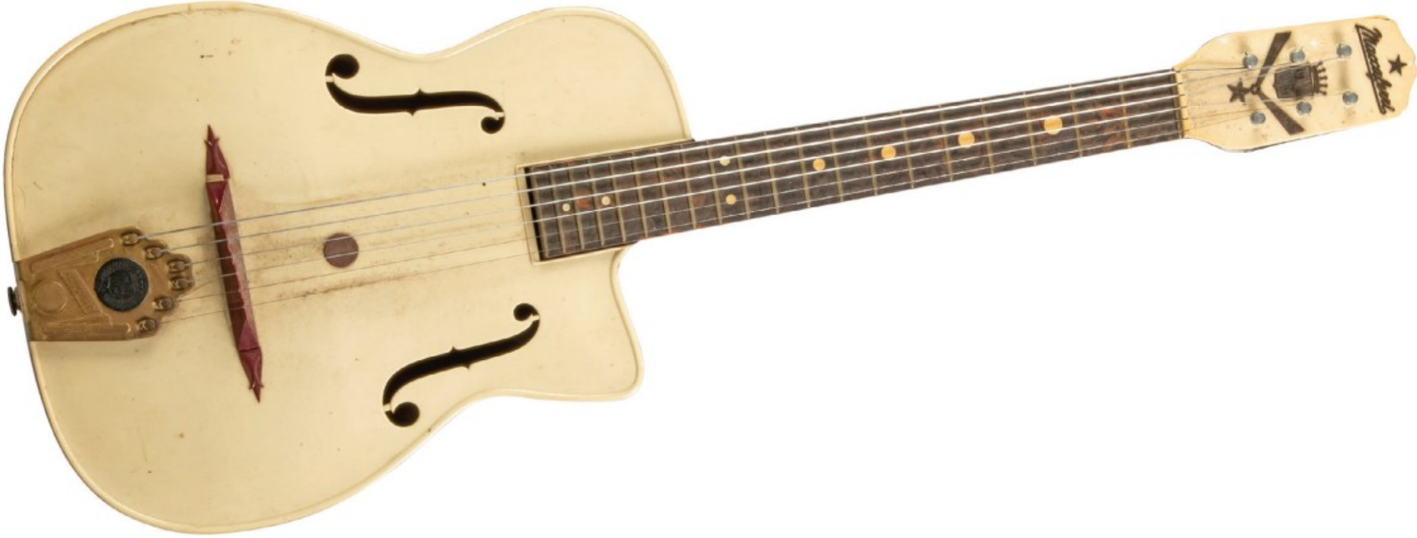
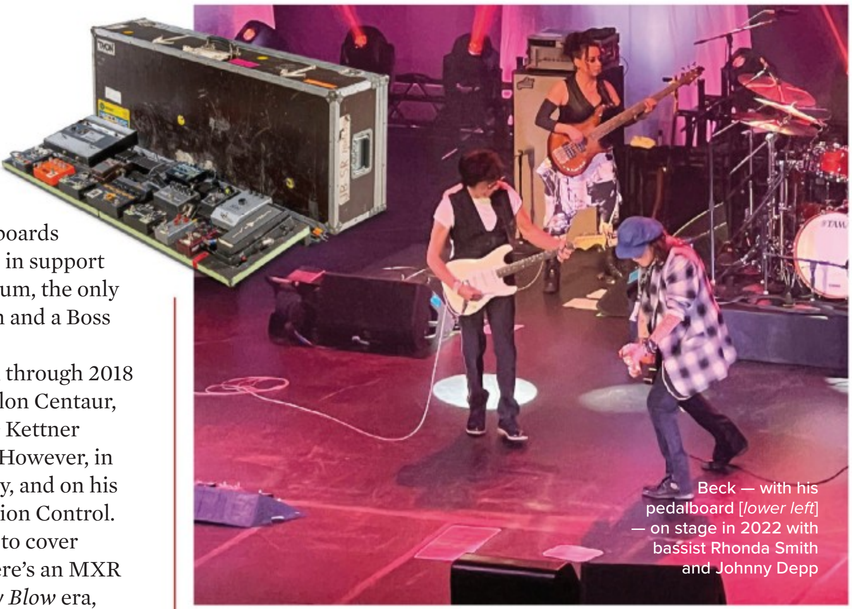


c. 1950s **Mario Maccaferri** G40

"THIS IS ONE of my prized possessions given to me by Jimmy Page," Beck said in a video shot in 2010 that was included with the *Rock 'n' Roll Party (Honoring Les Paul)* DVD. "It's the same brand of guitar used by the great Django Reinhardt [*actually Mario Maccaferri only designed the Selmer Modèle Orchestre guitar with an internal resonator that preceded the Selmer Modèle Jazz guitar that Django played*]. It's a fantastic, sweet little thing. You can pick it up while you're watching TV and noodling around. It's a nice thing to have lurking around and use as an exercise machine. It has a Django sound."

Maccaferri developed numerous plastic products during the post-World War II years, including clothespins that sold extremely well and made him a fortune. He also developed a variety of affordable plastic instruments that included the G40 guitar seen here, which originally sold for US$39.95 and was produced from 1952 until 1969. Elderly Instruments acquired leftover surplus stock, which they sold during the Eighties and Nineties.

Stage performance pedalboard, **2022 tour**



Beck — with his pedalboard [*lower left*] — on stage in 2022 with bassist Rhonda Smith and Johnny Depp

JEFF EXPERIMENTED WITH pedals often throughout his career — he was even one of the first British guitarists to use a fuzz pedal when he recorded "Heart Full of Soul" in April 1965 — but he almost never went whole hog when it came to using pedal boards full of effects on stage. Even in 1989 when he toured in support of his futuristic, high-tech sounding *Guitar Shop* album, the only effects he had on stage were a humble Rat distortion and a Boss DD-3 digital delay.

Beck's pedal board remained pretty low-key even through 2018 when he usually gigged with nothing more than a Klon Centaur, Snarling Dogs Super Bawl Whine-O wah, Hughes & Kettner Rotosphere and Way Huge Aqua Puss analog delay. However, in 2019 his pedalboard suddenly expanded significantly, and on his final 2022 tour it somewhat resembled NASA's Mission Control.

Beck's 2022 pedalboard seemed to be configured to cover any sound from any song from his entire career. There's an MXR M222 Talk Box for effects from his BBA and *Blow by Blow* era, an original vintage Maestro Ring Modulator for *Wired*, a Boss OC-3 Super Octave to fill in for his classic Mu-Tron Octave Divider, a Dunlop MC404 Custom Audio Electronics wah and an MXR M236 Super Badass Variac Fuzz to complete the Sixties- and Seventies-era sounds.

On the more modern side of the spectrum are a JHS VCR Signature PaxAm Modulation (with discontinued Ryan Adams graphics) for chorus and reverb, an Empress Effects Tremolo, Neo Instruments Ventilator II rotary cabinet simulator, MXR M117R Flanger and a Dunlop EP103 Echoplex Delay. A custom J. Rockett Archer boost/overdrive pedal that was a prototype for the limited-edition Archer Jeff pedal with NOS components replaced the Klon Centaur that even Beck considered too expensive and rare to risk losing or damaging while on the road.

Functional accessories include a Radial Engineering Shotgun guitar splitter and buffer for driving several amps at once or freely selecting individual amps, two GigRig Loopy pedals to provide independent loop switching for his ring modulator, octave, flanger and delay pedals and On Stage LED pedalboard lights.

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Jeff Beck on stage in the mid Seventies with his modified 1954 “Oxblood” Gibson Les Paul

Blown Away

Jeff Beck's landmark *Blow by Blow* dramatically transformed the future for instrumental electric guitar music. Fifty years later, it still remains an inspirational force

STORY BY CHRIS GILL

The following is a preview of the upcoming Jeff Beck biography Blow by Blow *by Brad Tolinski & Chris Gill, scheduled for release in October by Grand Central/Hachette Books.*

JEFF BECK'S BLOW *by Blow* shouldn't have been a success. By all accounts, it was a huge risk, even in the heady, more musically adventurous era of the mid Seventies. It was an instrumental album — an instrumental jazz album. Perhaps oddest of all, it was an instrumental jazz album by a rock guitarist, which meant that it ran a highly possible risk of alienating rock and jazz audiences alike. And even though Epic Records released separate singles of three songs from the album in Japan, the U.K. and the U.S., none of the songs became hits.

Yet audiences in the United States, United Kingdom and beyond enthusiastically embraced *Blow by Blow*. It peaked at a remarkable Number 4 on the *Billboard* 200 album chart and earned Platinum certification, outselling every single album Beck previously released with the Jeff Beck Group and Beck, Bogert & Appice, which all managed to go Gold. In fact, *Blow by Blow* (along with its similar follow-up, *Wired*) remains the best-selling album of Beck's entire career.

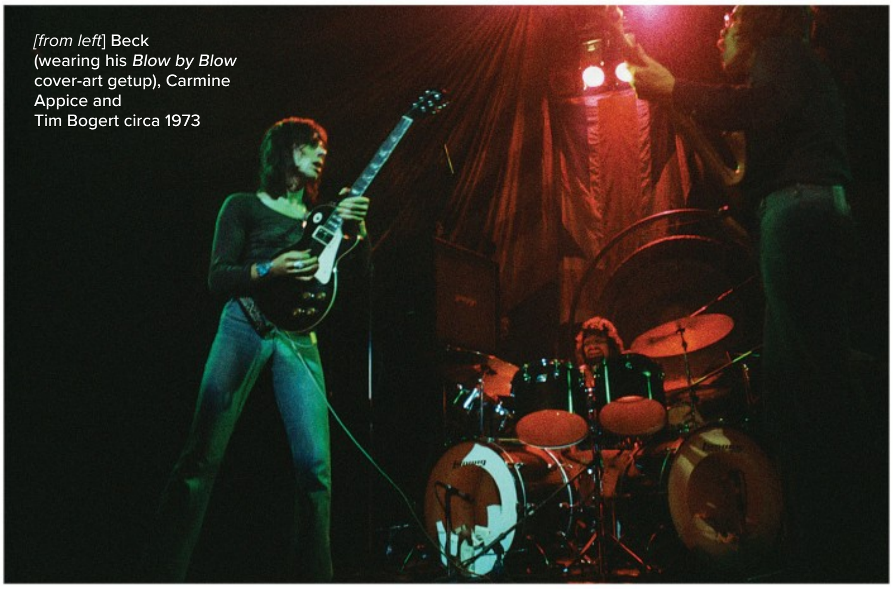
However, the success of *Blow by Blow* was much wider reaching than mere chart positions and album sales figures. Beck's bold move opened up new possibilities for jazz and progressive guitarists like Al Di Meola, Allan Holdsworth and numerous other musicians to release albums that appealed to jazz and rock fans alike. It also helped spark the instrumental shred guitar phenomenon that started a few years later in the early Eighties by proving that there was indeed a relatively sizable potential audience for instrumental guitar music. Its success even had a profound effect on Beck himself, giving him a sense of direction that influenced his remaining career by encouraging him to rely on his inner-muse.

> **"It opened up new possibilities for jazz and progressive guitarists"**

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of *Blow by Blow*, we're taking a look back at the history of this revolutionary album that changed the path and popularity of the electric guitar in a highly profound way.

➔

JEFFREY MAYER/WIREIMAGE



[from left] Beck (wearing his *Blow by Blow* cover-art getup), Carmine Appice and Tim Bogert circa 1973

DAVID WARNER ELLIS/GETTY IMAGES

FROM BLUES TO FUNK

During the early Seventies, Jeff Beck had earned a reputation as being difficult to work with that was not entirely undeserved. Ever since being fired from the Yardbirds in November 1966, Beck seemed unable or unwilling to settle into any particular musical direction for a prolonged period of time. When Beck first put together the Jeff Beck Group with singer Rod Stewart in 1967, he went through a staggering variety of bass players and drummers before settling upon Ronnie Wood on bass and Micky Waller on drums just prior to recording their first album, 1968's *Truth*. However, Waller was gone by the second album (1969's *Beck-Ola*), and by the third Jeff Beck Group album the guitarist was accompanied by an entirely different lineup as Beck shifted from a hard rock/blues focus to a more funk and R&B-inspired sound.

That second lineup managed to last two albums (*Rough & Ready*, *Jeff Beck Group*) before Beck threw in the towel during the summer of 1972. Retaining only keyboardist Max Middleton, Beck started a new lineup with Tim Bogert on bass and vocals and Carmine Appice on drums. This eventually became the hard blues-rock power trio Beck, Bogert & Appice, but that band was also short-lived and broke up in early 1974 after releasing one studio album and a live album released in Japan. In an interview with *Classic Rock*, Appice said, "Rod Stewart had told me long ago regarding Jeff: 'Don't do it. You'll do an album or two, and then it'll be over.' We didn't listen to that advice, but that's what happened. It ended up a mess at the end."

Reports of arguments and physical altercations suggested that Beck was nearly impossible to work with, which was partly true. However, the main reason why the guitarist went through so many different lineups is that he was still searching to find his own musical voice. It was particularly frustrating for Beck when his good friend Jimmy Page experienced greater success with Led Zeppelin using a similar heavy blues-rock formula Beck that pioneered on *Truth*, which preceded *Led Zeppelin* by about half a year. The fact that Zep also recorded a cover of Muddy Waters' "You Shook Me" further salted his wounds.

Looking to move beyond the increasingly crowded blues-rock idiom, Beck became attracted to the allure of funk and R&B. This led to a botched attempt to record an album at Detroit's legendary Motown studios in 1970 and the inspired, albeit ultimately underwhelming, hiring of Steve Cropper to produce the *Jeff Beck Group* album in 1972.

That album featured a cover version of Stevie Wonder's "I Got to Have a Song," which captured Wonder's attention. Later that year, Wonder invited Beck to participate in sessions at Electric Lady studios in New York City for the album *Talking Book*. Beck played guitar on "Lookin' for Another Pure Love."

During the sessions, Beck also inspired Wonder to write "Superstition" when the guitarist was fooling around on the drums and came up with a driving, funky beat. Jamming on a Hohner Clavinet keyboard, Wonder wrote what Beck called "the riff of the century." Wonder planned on giving the song exclusively to Beck as a gift, but Wonder's management quickly saw its potential as a hit single and demanded that he record it himself. Beck later recorded a heavy rock version of "Superstition" for the first Beck, Bogert & Appice album, but its impact was ultimately thwarted by the dynamic brilliance of Wonder's single. Apparently feeling somewhat guilty for the events that transpired with "Superstition," Wonder later eventually delivered another gift to Beck that proved to be even more beneficial to the guitarist's career.

ENTER FUSION

Sometime during the early Seventies, a mishap led to a profound life-changing event for Beck. While working in his garage trying to repair a car he had crashed, Beck had an epiphany.

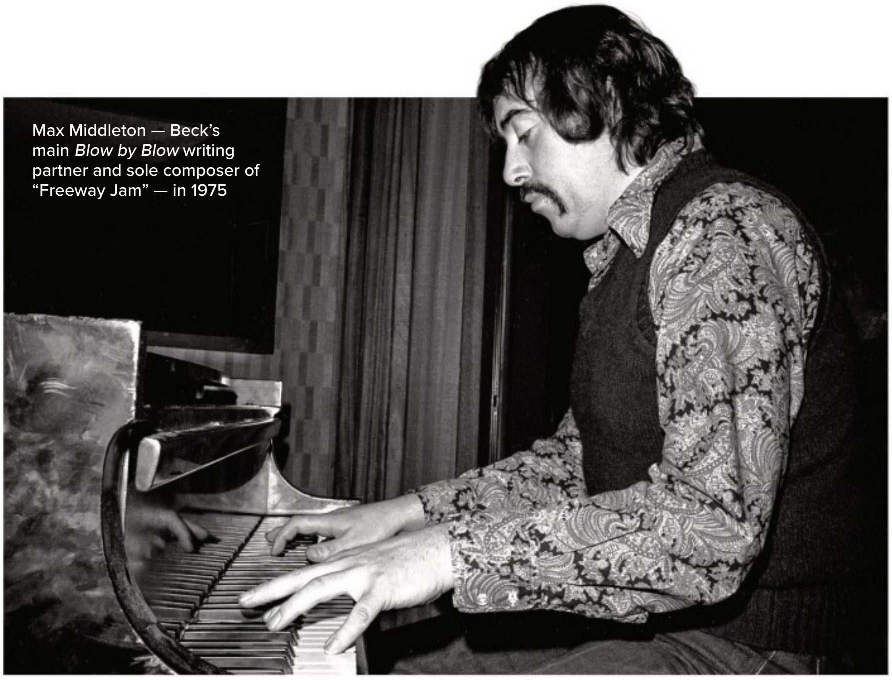
> **"The ultimate turning point for Beck was seeing Mahavishnu Orchestra live in Central Park"**

"I was looking up at the wreck of the car that I'd crashed, thinking I was finished," Beck wrote in his book *Beck01: Hot Rods and Rock & Roll*. "I was working underneath the car and could hardly move. My head was on the ground and water was coming down the driveway. A little transistor radio was playing Miles Davis's *Jack Johnson* [*the track was "Right Off," which is the entirety of side one*]. Lying there in the water, I realized I wasn't done yet, and this music was going to save me. I went inside and just sat there, sopping wet, listening to the album. I thought I'd been resurrected, like a phoenix. I went out and bought the record and then found out about [*guitarist*] John McLaughlin and [*drummer*] Billy Cobham."

Beck kept his newfound passion for this burgeoning style of jazz known as fusion, which added new exploratory elements of rock and electric instruments to the jazz vernacular, mostly to himself over the next few years. He was fascinated with the improvisational and rhythmic possibilities that jazz-fusion presented for expanding the rock repertoire, especially since he was beginning to grow tired of playing the same blues-rock riffs.

"A handful of tapes knock me out," Beck told Steve Rosen in the November 1975 issue of *Guitar Player*, "things like Billy Cobham, Stanley Clarke — all the great rock and rollers. I call Billy Cobham a rock and roller because he's so forceful. Rock's an energy to me. It's more complex now than it was, but it's rock just the same."

Carmine Appice later claimed that he introduced Beck to Billy Cobham's 1973



Max Middleton — Beck's main *Blow by Blow* writing partner and sole composer of "Freeway Jam" — in 1975

MARK SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

Spectrum album during their time together in Beck, Bogert & Appice, but by that time Beck seemed to already be familiar with Cobham and McLaughlin's work together in McLaughlin's post-Miles Davis band, the Mahavishnu Orchestra. In fact, Beck allegedly cancelled shows by Beck, Bogert & Appice so he could attend the Mahavishnu Orchestra's concerts in New York's Central Park in August 1973. Even if Appice and Beck did share a common love of fusion music, that never emerged as a direction pursued by their band.

"I remember Mahavishnu Orchestra playing in Central Park at the Schaefer Music Festival in August 1973," Beck wrote in *Beck01*. "*Between Nothingness & Eternity* was the live album that resulted from that concert. There was something like 30,000 people watching this ridiculously high-powered music: jazz-rock fusion, furious playing and outrageous time signatures. I thought, 'This is more like it,' and that's where *Blow by Blow* came from."

McLaughlin's guitar playing with the Mahavishnu Orchestra was raw, exhilarating and blazingly fast, as were Tommy Bolin's guitar performances with Cobham on *Spectrum*. Both impressed Beck significantly, but the guitarist actually took more inspiration from the synthesizer player that both groups (as well as Stanley Clarke) shared in common: Jan Hammer. "Jan gave me a new, exciting look into the future," Beck told *Guitar Player* in 1975. "He plays the Moog a lot like a guitar, and his sounds went straight into me. So I started playing like him. I didn't sound like him, but his phrases influenced me immensely."

Possibly the ultimate turning point for Beck was when Mahavishnu Orchestra released *Apocalypse* in April 1974, which happened to be about the same time Beck disbanded Beck, Bogert & Appice and was seriously considering releasing a jazz-fusion album as a solo artist as his next career move. McLaughlin had assembled a new lineup for his group, replacing Cobham and Hammer with drummer Narada Michael Walden and keyboardist Gayle Moran, respectively, but Beck barely noticed the absence of some of his favorite players. Instead, he was particularly blown away by the dynamic blend of aggressive guitar accompanied by lush orchestral arrangements performed by the London Symphony Orchestra.

Apocalypse was expertly produced by Sir George Martin, who called it "one of the best records I have ever made" in his 1979 book *All You Need Is Ears*. The album's immaculate sound quality and energy convinced Beck that he needed to hire Martin to produce his solo album. "I turned up at George Martin's office with a diabolically bad demo," Beck recalled, "but he could see there was something there." Martin agreed to sign on to the project, and in October 1974 work on *Blow by Blow* commenced at London's AIR studios.

"***Blow by Blow* is less jazz-rock fusion; it's more of a jazz-funk fusion effort"**

THE LINEUP

Beck reunited with keyboardist Max Middleton to write material and record *Blow by Blow*. Initially Carmine Appice played drums on the early sessions, but he was fired after he insisted on having his name appear prominently alongside Beck's on the album cover. "Carmine kicked up such a fuss about him wanting it to be his album," Middleton told journalist Bruce Stringer in 2003, "so Jeff kicked him off and asked me if I knew anybody else. I brought in [*drummer*] Richard Bailey and [*bassist*] Phillip Chen because I knew them for some time, and that was how we did that album."

Although *Blow by Blow* is commonly described as a jazz-rock fusion album, it's really more of a jazz-funk fusion effort. "I was constantly trying to put funk into the record," Beck said. "I was influenced by Larry Graham's Graham Central Station, which I was listening to on a loop in my car at the time. I played George [*Martin*] a couple of tracks, and he said it was the worst-recorded sound he'd ever heard. George wanted Beatles-esque orchestrations and strong melodies. I didn't really appreciate what George was doing to the extent he deserved. I should've known better than to underestimate him. I didn't take much notice of what he was gently trying to push me to do."

Beck won the argument, of course, since it was his solo album and his name appeared on the cover. The funk element is strong and present from the get-go, with scratchy funk chords that are more than obviously inspired by Jimmy Nolen's playing on James Brown's "Sex Machine" kicking off the album's first track, "You Know What I Mean," penned by Beck and Middleton. However, Beck's adventurous solos and complex lead melodies showed listeners used to his heavy rock bluster that he was venturing deep into new territory.

"That *Blow by Blow* opening is pure funk," says John McLaughlin, who co-headlined Beck's 1975 tour in support of *Blow by Blow*. "I'm sure that's why he hired [*drummer*] Bernard Purdie and [*bassist*] Wilbur Bascomb, who both came from James Brown's band, as his rhythm section for the tour. When we both got together to jam at the end of each show, we would be dancing on stage with that rhythm section just kicking our butts."

Allegedly George Martin was not the biggest fan of Middleton's reggae-inspired arrangement of the Beatles' "She's a Woman." Beck had actually publicly leaked this arrangement of the Lennon and McCartney tune earlier when he performed alongside the band Upp, who he was producing, on the BBC's *Five Faces of the Guitar* special broadcast in September 1974. The BBC broadcast possibly

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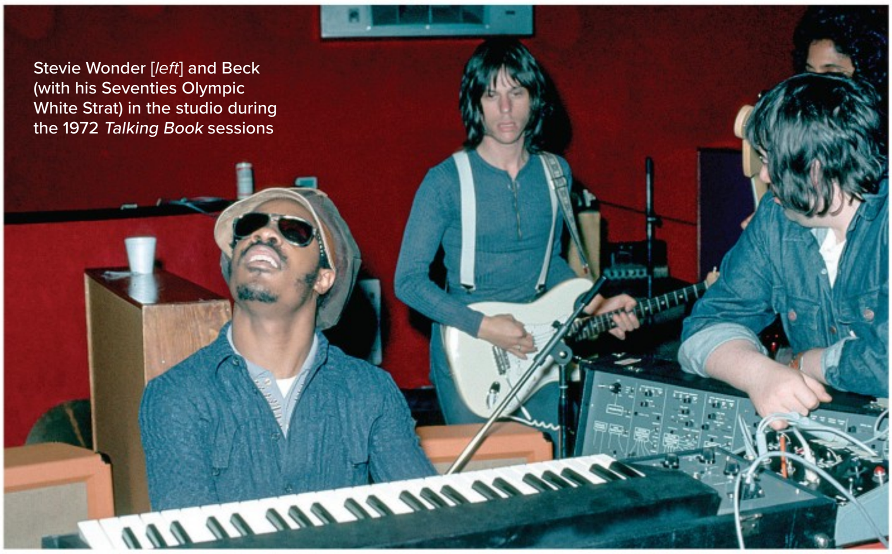

Stevie Wonder [*left*] and Beck (with his Seventies Olympic White Strat) in the studio during the 1972 *Talking Book* sessions

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

provides a glimpse at the main rig Beck used while recording *Blow by Blow*. Here the guitarist was seen playing his modified 1954 “Oxblood” Gibson Les Paul, an Ampeg VT-40 combo amp, Colorsound Overdriver, Cry Baby wah, ZB Custom volume pedal and Kustom “The Bag” talk box, the latter heard prominently on “She’s a Woman.” Other gear that Beck is known to have used on the album includes two Stratocasters — an early Seventies Olympic White model and one with a stripped-finish early Sixties body and mid Seventies rosewood neck — and the famous “Tele-Gib” 1959 Telecaster with two PAF humbuckers assembled by Seymour Duncan.

The Beck composition “Constipated Duck” pulls the album back into funk territory with Middleton’s clavinet licks and Beck’s trippy double-stop echo tricks. The guitarist’s distinctive note bends offer the first glimpse at Jan Hammer’s influence. More Nolen-style chords kick off “AIR Blower” (credited to the entire band) before the song quickly settles into a funk-fusion groove. Beck’s gritty fuzz tone solos and harmonized lines in tandem with Middleton’s synth take the guitarist about as far away from his blues-rock past as Mississippi is from Manhattan, further punctuated by Beck’s jazzy lines around the 3-1/2 minute mark where a slow, loose tempo shift occurs.

Side one closes with “Scatterbrain” co-written by Beck and Middleton, which sounds the closest to the reason why Beck hired Martin to produce the album in the first place. Here, the orchestral string section that Martin wanted all along finally makes an appearance, although it’s more subdued than the arrangements Martin employed on *Apocalypse*. Here the jazz fusion element is present and accounted for in full force, with some passages even bearing a slight resemblance to Mahavishnu’s “Vision Is a Naked Sword.”

Next up on the album are the “consolation gifts” Stevie Wonder gave Jeff after what transpired with “Superstition,” and what gifts they were. “Cause We’ve Ended as Lovers” was a song that Wonder had originally written for his ex-wife Syreeta, who released it on the 1974 album *Stevie Wonder Presents: Syreeta*. However, Wonder thought it would be a good song for Beck to cover, and the guitarist agreed.

Beck’s emotional performance was particularly notable for the distinctive crying tones he summoned by manipulating the Tele-Gib’s volume and tone controls. This was inspired by Roy Buchanan’s technique, which Beck acknowledged by dedicating the song to him. The descending chromatic line around the 4:15 mark also seems to be a sly tribute to a very similar line he played on Wonder’s “Lookin’ for Another Pure Love.” In addition to being the album’s *tour de force* showcase performance, the song became a common beloved feature of Beck’s concert set lists throughout his remaining career.

Wonder himself makes an uncredited appearance playing clavinet on “Thelonious,” which he also wrote during the *Talking Book* sessions. This is arguably the deepest funk track on the album, with grooves and riffs that *almost* match “Superstition.” Beck uses a Mu-Tron Octave Divider to summon a downright *nas-tay* horn- or synth-like tone, punctuated by talk box accents.

JEFF BECK
BLOW BY BLOW

Next, “Freeway Jam” finally delivers the track that most closely fits the jazz-rock fusion description. This was also the album’s closest thing to a hit, receiving heavy rotation on FM album rock stations throughout most of the remainder of the Seventies. Here, Beck is definitely playing one of his Strats, liberally using the vibrato bar to accentuate notes with wild warbling bends and deep dives. Like “Lovers” it also became a fixture of Beck’s live set lists.

“Diamond Dust” ends *Blow by Blow* with the accompaniment of a second orchestral string arrangement by Martin. The song was written by Bernie Holland, who was the guitarist in the band Hummingbird, formed in 1974 by Middleton and other members of the second iteration of the Jeff Beck Group. The song is as much of a showcase for Middleton’s electric piano and synth playing as it is for Beck’s melodic motifs and soloing.

AFTERMATH

Beck acknowledged John McLaughlin’s profound influence by inviting the Mahavishnu Orchestra on a co-headlining tour in 1975. “We just wanted to see if it was going to work, and boy, did it work,” recalled Beck. “The next thing I knew I was on stage doing a double headliner with John. It was a bit barbaric and chaotic, but it was more music per square inch than I’d ever heard. When we opened the show, the audience went utterly berserk.”

Beck and McLaughlin’s cross-pollination of rock and jazz styles had made both outcasts of sorts from their respective main genres, but by banding together they helped lift each other up and beyond those restraints and biases. McLaughlin was particularly touched by Beck’s acknowledgement of the Mahavishnu guitarist’s influence on his playing style.

“When you have an impact on somebody who is already a very fine musician, it’s kind of a little humbling, isn’t it?” McLaughlin says. “Beck was kind of an outsider, and I got a lot of flak from the traditional jazz community where I was being told, ‘This ain’t jazz.’ But Jeff broke down those barriers, and now they’ve disappeared. Today it doesn’t matter what kind of music you play; it’s how you play it. When the spirit gets you, it doesn’t matter where you’re coming from — the spirit will be heard. Every musician that I know who heard Jeff loved him, and his spirit will live on forever.”

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Orianthi

The former guitarist for Michael Jackson and Alice Cooper has survived the trials and tribulations of the pop industry, emerging with a new energy and sound that honours her true inspirations and talents

Words Andrew Daly

Orianthi is busy as hell. She's riding high after her last two records – 2020's *O* and 2022's *Rock Candy* – showed the world that she's not only a great singer and performer but a rip-roarin' titan on guitar, too. It wasn't always that way, though, not that people knew any better. Had the music industry had its way, Orianthi – who had a massive pop hit with her 2009 single *According To You* – would have been chewed up and spat out. But that's not how it went down. And the best part is that now it's Ori's way or the highway.

"I've been through a lot in this industry," she admits. "I really have [sighs]. I manage myself; I'm doing business 24/7. I have an incredible team around me, but, ultimately, I make the final decisions. In the beginning, being signed in such a big situation and having a whole circus around me… To be honest, as I've gotten older, I've realised that life is short, and every day when you wake up do something a little different."

Orianthi has gone from topping the pop charts to integrating herself deeply within the blues, rock and guitar spaces. From the outside looking in, her rise and subsequent pivot seemed easy – but it wasn't. "I hate the music business," she insists. "But I love music. God, I love it so much."

Which is why Ori is recording not one but two records. The first, a blues-rock-leaning affair produced by Kevin Shirley, and the second, an Eddie Kramer-produced jam-meets-psych record with drummer Cindy Blackman Santana and bassist Rhonda Smith; the latter album is another animal altogether.

As for how she balances it all, she says: "Gratitude is very important. So many successful people are miserable and, honestly, I wasn't enjoying myself at the beginning. I was very unhappy, alone and upset. I was constantly going, 'I'm not good enough. I need people to help me.'"

But it's not like that any more. "Everything we need is within ourselves," she says. "Taking the time to find it is part of your journey as a human. I'm very into the spiritual realm because everything has an energy around it that resonates. And when you hear it, that moves you."

Few have been able to wrench themselves from the clutches of pop stardom and pivot toward halcyon guitar infamy, but Orianthi has. And yet she's chill about it, aiming to be a positive force for others, rather than leading with an ego.

"You can be a [woman] in this industry and be successful," she says. "I learned from guys, but my whole thing is it doesn't matter if you love playing. You just play, right? If you dedicate your time to what you love, it doesn't matter if you're male or female. That's really important. It's about being your own person, going with it and being authentic."

You've dialled in your sound over your last couple of records. What's been the key to that?

"I'm trying to get better. I've never stopped learning and want to be a better guitar player. I also want to be a better singer and songwriter because everyone has their own mind, fingerprint and journey. There were quite a few records where I was told the parameters, like, 'This is what you have to do. You have to make a heavy record,' or 'You have to make a pop record.'

"I was told what to do, but I wanted to play guitar. There's freedom in that. You learn that there's people out there that you'll find who think they own you… but the label I'm working with now [Woodward Avenue Records] truly believes in me as an artist."

Are your two latest tracks, *First Time Blues* and *Ghost*, indicators of where you're going?

"Yes. And soon we're putting out *Some Kind Of Feeling* [available now], which is quite different. I wrote *Some Kind Of Feeling* a while ago on acoustic and it's got a soul kind of feel. People might think it's quite a departure, but I figured, 'You know what? I put out enough heartbreak songs. Why not put out a happy song to manifest some good shit?'

"I don't want to be a person who only writes songs about a horrible relationship. This is about love, connection, what music does and what somebody can do when they come into your life. It can be love, a friend or a person… It's just about feeling good. Life is all about connections for me, and this song represents that. I really dig the new vibe… it's really different."

It's part of a larger album you're working on with Kevin Shirley. But you're also working on another album with Eddie Kramer.

"So [I] self-produced *First Time Blues* and *Ghost*; the rest of the album is produced by Kevin Shirley. He's a master, he's freakin' great. My solo album is coming out, and Kevin and I are producing it.

"The second record I'm doing is a side project, a supergroup with Cindy Blackman Santana and Rhonda Smith. It's a three-piece, like a Band Of Gypsys vibe but the tunes are commercial and we hope to reach a lot of people. We've moulded our own sound with Eddie Kramer. It's an honour to record with him and I'm excited for everyone to hear. We're nearly done with that record – so it's two."

How has Eddie impacted you as a guitarist?

"He's a legend, incredible, and he definitely has brought out something that other producers haven't with his energy alone. Eddie focuses on getting the right microphone placement and works his magic. He's always twiddling around with the knobs in the studio and getting the right compression and settings. It's very old-school and interesting. I love watching Eddie in the studio when he's panning and doing wild shit. We did a 25-minute jam, which will be on the record, and he had to mix that. He was sweating afterward! We go off on these tangents. I don't know… we're on some weird frequency where we cut it and it was just wild. And Eddie, because I'm such a huge Hendrix fan, I respect him so much. He suggests things like, 'Why don't you try this amplifier, this setting, this pedal or this guitar?' I'll try whatever he calls for, you know? My heart is open. Being in the studio with Eddie Kramer and Kevin is an honour."

How does working with Kevin Shirley compare?

"He gets such a great sound and incredible guitar tones. We'll do takes until I get it right, and it's just very inspiring. Kevin does things a different way. The way he mics things up and goes through things with me, like, 'Yeah, this guitar didn't work too bad,' or 'Maybe we'll try this at this part,' it's really wonderful. I'm grateful to have them both on these records coming out next year."

Is there a throughline between the two projects?

"With Eddie, I kind of got into the psychedelic realm of my childhood from when I was 14 or 15, when I was just sitting in my room, listening to Hendrix and experimenting. With Eddie, there's a lot more searching – and with Kevin, it's more structured in how I approach the solos. Is that intentional? Well, it's structured with both but wildly structured with Eddie. I want the sounds to be different. I don't want people

1. Orianthi has recently hit the studio with two legendary producers, Kevin Shirley and Eddie Kramer, for forthcoming – and contrasting – album releases in 2025

PHOTO BY SEBASTIAN GARCIA COURTESY OF ORANGE

2. The new signature Oriverb from Orange Amps is a twin-channel, dual-EL34 powered 2x12 valve combo, with lightweight neodymium Celestion Creamback speakers. It was designed in collaboration with Orange's Pat Foley

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to go, 'Yeah, this group project sounds the same as her solo album,' you know? I don't want people to say, 'Oh, her guitar playing always sounds the same.' I want to be inspired differently, so the energy is different."

There's been significant progression across your records. Was there a moment when you felt you'd finally found yourself as a guitarist?
"We're constantly evolving as humans. I'm constantly evolving as a guitar player. I have a fingerprint of the way I play, which is maybe a mix of Carlos Santana meets Stevie Ray Vaughan meets Gary Moore and whatever else. I put all my influences in, but at the end of the day, I like to experiment. I don't consider myself to be just a singer, or just a guitarist, or just this or that, you know? It's all of those things. It's always evolving and I hope that when I'm much older, I can go, 'Man, that record, I'm really proud of that.'"

> *"Being a pop artist and having people say you're not good enough is pretty messed up... Being authentic is very important"*

Are you getting that vibe from the music you're making now?
"These next two, honestly, I feel they're the best ones I've made in my career. It feels like there's more freedom and I'm putting less pressure on myself. I just want to be remembered as an artist who inspired people with every song. And I don't want to bore myself, either, because I get bored easily [laughs], so it's an open-minded approach."

Are there certain guitars that lead to that open-mindedness?
"Absolutely! I've gotten into a habit – or a good habit, depending on how you look at it – of buying vintage guitars. I love my '63 Strat, which I use a lot. I've got a '61 Tele, which I use a lot, and I have my 1962 ES-335, which I just got, and I've absolutely fallen in love with that guitar!

3

3. The new Oriverb looks to the sound of a rare Dumble amp that Orianthi had the pleasure of playing in the company of its creator, plus iconic Marshall and Fender-style tones. Meanwhile, her PRS signature remains by her side. "The sound of PRS is like a Ferrari," she says. "It's a smooth guitar and everything just works. They're pieces of art, too"

PHOTO COURTESY OF ORANGE

"I love older guitars because they hold different energy. They're all personalities and I like to surround myself with them. My house is literally crystals, guitars, amplifiers, Buddhas and cats. It's very eccentric there [laughs]. But yeah, vintage guitars can be like spiritual healers. It's so interesting."

What got you into vintage guitars?

"When you hit a chord on one, it's like a grand piano or something. I just love recording with them because you just hit a chord, like with this 1800s parlour guitar I have, it just sounds different. It's warmer, though tuning is a pain in the ass [laughs]. I don't like taking it on the road.

"I don't think that [vintage guitars] should be out on the road. They shouldn't be workhorses because they've already been workhorses for many, many years since they're vintage. So, for me, they're best used in the studio. But it's fun... I work really hard and spend my money on some guitars that I feel are right."

And the vintage gear is very different from your signature PRS model.

"PRS has been incredibly supportive since I was young. I have my signature models, the purple one, my main one, and now I have a white one, my second main one. I use those a lot because they have all the elements... the sound of PRS is like a Ferrari. It's a very smooth guitar and everything just works. It's sort of a combination of Fender and Gibson together, and they're pieces of art, too."

4

PHOTO BY SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES

4. Orianthi recently added this 1962 ES-335 to her growing collection of vintage guitars – and she's made an exception to her rule of keeping her vintage instruments strictly in the studio by taking this 'new' addition out on stage

"We're constantly evolving as humans. I'm constantly evolving as a guitar player... I like to experiment"

Elsewhere, you've got a new signature amp with Orange, the Oriverb.

"That amp took a couple of years to make. Pat Foley, one of my very dear friends, and I designed it together. We went back and forth to dial it in. People think, 'Oh, it's just another Rockerverb combo, but it's white.' But we've changed a lot of things, from the speakers to the tubes to the reverb and the distortion. You can really push it like a vintage amp. It will be out soon, and for the price [it streets around $4,299], you can't find such a rich-sounding and full reverb."

Did you model the Oriverb after vintage amps?

"Absolutely. I had the honour of sitting with Alexander Dumble long ago when he was alive. I went to his home, plugged into all his amps, and he let me play the first amp that he ever made. I never forgot the sound of that amp. So it's got a bit of Dumble sound mixed with an old Marshall and a Fender Twin. It's got a sound that cuts through and has high-end when you bring up the mids and the treble. But, ultimately, it's warm-sounding and well rounded."

When you reflect on your journey, from where you started to where you are now, what sticks out most?

"God... I don't know. I don't get proud of anything. Just standing up for myself more, saying, 'This is how I feel as an artist and this is what I want to do.' You get beaten down when you're in the pop world. I did that for many years. Being a pop artist and having people saying you're not good enough is pretty messed up. Half the shit that goes down, supposedly needing a songwriter, being told you can't write a hit song or you're not thin enough... It's crazy. You're never good enough, need media training, and are told all this crazy shit until you say, 'What the fuck?' We're all individuals who should be celebrated in different ways. Now, I've learned that being who you are and being authentic is very important."

You easily could have been swallowed up by the machine, but you weren't. That's also something to be proud of.

"It's not easy. When you come out as a pop artist and you go, 'I actually grew up listening to Hendrix, Santana and the blues,' people say, 'Wait a second... no, you're a pop singer.' They frown upon it – you know, the blues community, the purists, or whatever they call themselves. It's like, 'What's she doing here?'"

Do you feel more accepted now?

"The last couple of years, with the new sound, I've been more accepted where people say, 'Okay, cool. She's ventured off now.' As scary as that can be – because people expect a certain thing and you don't want to lose the audience. The main thing is to feel good and have a positive message. Life is colourful. I'm self-managed, so every day I wake up and deal with 101 things. It's a lot, but I work hard to pay my spiritual healers to keep myself sane in this business [laughs]."

Orianthi's *Some Kind Of Feeling* single is available now via Woodward Avenue Records. For more news and info, head to the website **www.orianthi.me**

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John Petrucci with his signature Ernie Ball Music Man 10th Anniversary Majesty in Silver Chalice

DREAM ON

Forty years into their career, Dream Theater have received a vital transfusion via the return of original drummer Mike Portnoy. John Petrucci takes you inside the reunion — and the band's new album

BY JON WIEDERHORN

"HAVING MIKE BACK, AND ALL OF US BEING TOGETHER IN THE STUDIO MADE US FEEL LIKE WE WERE 18 AGAIN"

FOR DREAM THEATER, it was a nightmare scenario. On September 8, 2010, after months of emotional turmoil, original drummer Mike Portnoy announced he was leaving the band. The move came as a shock to the band's fans, many of whom viewed Portnoy as the group's heartbeat, the precise, polyrhythmic pulse that anchored the songs and gave guitarist John Petrucci a colorful, well-lit lane in which to fervently speed, randomly meander, or passionately roll.

The natural chemistry between Petrucci and Portnoy dates back to their early days jamming together. The story began when the guitarist and his middle school buddy and bassist John Myung met the drummer in 1985 at the Berklee College of Music in Boston and started the band Majesty. For nearly 25 years, they had a nearly insatiable hunger for writing, recording and performing experimental prog-metal and rarely allowed personal matters to interrupt their musical ambition.

"We had lofty goals from the very beginning," Petrucci says from his hotel room in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, where Dream Theater just finished a show with Portnoy for their 40th Anniversary Tour. "We looked up to bands like Iron Maiden and Rush, who had long careers and were always putting out records. We wanted to do the same thing." →

MARK MARYANOVICH

Dream Theater in 2024 [*from left*]: Mike Portnoy, John Petrucci, James LaBrie, John Myung and Jordan Rudess

MARK MARYANOVICH

Starting with their 1989 debut, *When Dream and Day Unite*, the band combined their diverse influences (including Rush, Yes, Metallica, Dixie Dreggs, Iron Maiden, King Crimson and Al Di Meola) and created iconoclastic, mathematically complex prog-metal that shattered boundaries. The band became tighter and more adventurous with time. Multi-faceted full-lengths were followed by world tours, and soon after one album cycle ended, the next would begin. It was how Dream Theater flowed — like a huge, glittering waterfall in constant motion — and it allowed the band to maintain visibility through the grunge, alternative and nu-metal movements and retain a dedicated fanbase. But the decades of churning and burning took its toll on Portnoy. Having devoted 25 years to the band, the acrobatic drummer wanted to take at least a year off to decompress and focus on other projects. Such a request was unacceptable to his bandmates, so Portnoy bailed.

"It just came down to priorities," Petrucci says. "He wanted to take some time off, and we wanted to keep going with our busy schedule, writing and recording and then going on a full world tour that could last for a year and half or more. He wanted to stop, we didn't, and that was the decision we made. We did what we needed to do in order to keep going."

"I was starting to feel trapped, and they wanted me to commit to a certain date to start the next record, and I just wasn't ready," Portnoy told the podcast *Everyone Loves Guitar* in 2020. "I went with my heart and said, 'Look, I'd rather regret something I have done than something I haven't.'"

Soon after Portnoy quit, Dream Theater held rigorous auditions and hired Berklee professor and ex-Steve Vai tour drummer Mike Mangini, who more than capably played on Dream Theater's next five albums. Seeing someone else behind the kit created tension between Portnoy and Petrucci, but they stayed in touch and their daughters even shared an apartment in New York for about five years.

During the 13 years Portnoy was out of Dream Theater, he played on 40 albums with many bands, including the power trio the Winery Dogs (Portnoy, guitarist Richie Kotzen and bassist Billy Sheehan), which released four albums. As early as 2013, however, Portnoy said he was ready to return to Dream Theater, but wasn't overly optimistic that it would happen. "I would do it in a heartbeat," he told MetalInjection.com. "But I honestly don't think they ever will; they've closed their door on it and I think they're too headstrong in having to prove themselves without me. So I wouldn't count on it. But my door is always open."

Then when the Covid pandemic hit, tensions between Petrucci and Portnoy substantially dissipated. Life was just too short for lingering animosity over life choices. So, when Petrucci was working on his second solo album, 2020's *Terminal Velocity*, he invited Portnoy to play drums. The two had such a good time reminiscing and reconnecting that they decided to reform their instrumental prog supergroup Liquid Tension Experiment and recorded *Liquid Tension Experiment 3* — the follow-up to 1999's *Liquid Tension Experiment 2* with King Crimson bassist Tony Levin and Dream Theater keyboardist Jordan Rudess.

Many Dream Theater fans thought the writing was on the wall for Portnoy's return, but the rest of the band was happy with Mangini, and some were unsure how bringing Portnoy back would change the vibe in the band. "Fans speculated that all the signs were leading to this, but we had no definite plans and it wasn't a sure thing," Petrucci says. "Then, one day the timing felt right and we all got together."

For Petrucci, the hardest part of the reconciliation was getting everyone into the rehearsal room at the same time. Yet he knew that once they were all together and started playing, the band would bond like a video of an exploding car projected in reverse. "We met Mike when we were teenagers and we played together as Dream Theater for 25 years, so we know exactly how to play together and sound great," he says. "When we finally did it, there were no surprises. Mike didn't miss a beat and everything was easy and exciting."

In February 2024, Dream Theater started writing new songs and setting up the conceptual threads for their 16th

album, *Parasomnia*, their most adventurous, energetic and darkly metallic album in more than a decade. Determined to recapture the impulsiveness, experimentation, heaviness and technical proficiency of records like 2003's *Train of Thought* and 2009's *Black Clouds & Silver Linings*, the band assembled an epic concept album about the dark side of sleep disorders that plunges into realms of terror, paralysis, and even murder.

"From the moment we started writing it, we knew it was going to be a heavy, aggressive album," Petrucci says. "Having Mike back, and all of us being together in the studio made us feel like we were 18 again. We just wanted to write super-heavy riffs and rock out."

When Petrucci uses words like "heavy" and "aggressive," he's not being hyperbolic. Not only is *Parasomnia* turbulent, dense and often fast, but some passages in "Night Terror," "A Broken Man" and "Midnight Messiah" feature guitar tones, palm-muted riffs and angular rhythms reminiscent of Metallica.

"To me, that's a huge compliment," Petrucci says, then smiles. "It was so exciting to draw back on some of my early influences. I'm a huge Metallica fan, and majorly influenced by James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett. I infused that style of fast, chuggy rhythmic playing into my sound and you can clearly hear it on the first Dream Theater album. It was great to bring some of that stuff back."

"FROM THE MOMENT WE STARTED WRITING IT, WE KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE A HEAVY, AGGRESSIVE ALBUM"

Did you write any of *Parasomnia* in advance or did you get in a room with Mike and let fly?

Mike rejoined in October 2023, and we started working on the new album all together in February 2024. I didn't have any songs going in, but I'm constantly writing and collecting chord progressions and different ideas to complement them, so when we start working on an album I have some direction. What's interesting is that I've had the title *Parasomnia* in my head for a few years, and along with that came this idea of having a lyrical theme that deals with different types of sleep disturbances.

The conceptual thread of sleep disorders drives and provides cohesion for the songs. Is *Parasomnia* something you've experienced?

Not more than anyone else. The idea

➔

"It's all my Ernie Ball Music Man signature Majesty," Petrucci says about the new album. "I used the eight-, seven- and six-string versions"

WOLFE ELIOT

Mike Portnoy — behind the kit once again with Dream Theater — in Zagreb, Croatia, October 28, 2024

surfaced when I was talking to my son one day, and he mentioned the word "parasomnia." I was like, "Whoa, what's that? I've never heard that word before, but it sounds cool." We talked about it, and I said, "Man, that would be a great album title for Dream Theater. The word has such a cool ring to it. And once I started diving into what it entailed, it brought up all these ideas that provided a wealth of inspiration to write some really cool, dark, creative songs.

So, the concept helped guide the music as well as the lyrics.
It did. And one of the first things Mike said when we started writing the songs was, "Hey, what if this wasn't only a lyrically conceptual album?" as I had proposed. "What if we took it a step further and made the music have that concept album feel as well?"

Was that a turning point for you?
It was a great suggestion, and we ended up taking that as far as our imaginations could go. We had recurring themes and little vignettes between the songs to connect them and give them more of the feel of a record like *The Dark Side of the Moon*, which is meant to be listened to from beginning to end. So, the album is almost like an experience. It starts off with somebody going to bed and drifting into a sleep state. And all these weird things happen to them when they're sleeping, and in the end they come out of it. I thought that was a really cool way to make this album more intense, creative and epic because having all these connections created a cinematic element to the album.

Did having Mike back on drums fuel the band's creativity?
As soon as Mike was back on the kit, everything started taking shape for the whole band. I met him when we were 18, and we were always together for so long, so as soon as we started playing again it was like having my buddy back. We were all inspired and felt so creative. "Night Terror" was the thing we wrote.

"PEOPLE WHO SUFFER FROM [SLEEP PARALYSIS] ARE AWAKE; THEY CAN SEE AND HEAR, BUT THEY CAN'T MOVE"

That song is almost 10 minutes long, and it's the heaviest track you've recorded in years, building from bleak and doomy to fast and thrashy before leveling off when the vocals kick in before hitting the gas again.
That song gives you a little idea of what the vibe was like in the studio. That's a big part of why we released it as the first single. We wanted listeners to feel what we felt after Mike rejoined — the excitement of being back with him in the studio. There's a brotherly chemistry between us that's undeniable.

Did you plan to start out with a banger or did it just burst out of you when you plugged in?
It exploded out of us. That's the way it works for us. We were pumped, and we naturally set off in a direction. Whether that direction comes from a riff, a chord progression, or a drum beat, it begins the flow and then this stream of consciousness takes over and we all start coming up with ideas.

Was Mike Mangini, who played in the band between 2010 and 2023 understanding about your decision to work with Portnoy again?
To his credit, he was wonderful about it. I called him and explained the conclu- ➔

LUCIJA OCKO/CROPIX/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Petrucci in action in Zagreb, Croatia, October 28, 2024; [*below right*] the artwork for Dream Theater's new album, *Parasomnia*

LUCIJA OCKO/CROPIX/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

sion we came to and he was really gracious and accepting, which helped make the change and transition very smooth and non-dramatic.

There are some contemplative tracks on *Parasomnia*, including the instrumental "Are We Dreaming" and "Bend the Clock." Did the heaviest material come to you first?
I think the second song we wrote was "Broken Man," so yeah, I'd say we stayed heavy for a while, which was so much fun.

You've never constrained yourself musically, and *Parasomnia* is no exception. There's a haunting, harrowing instrumental overture, crushing riffs, shredding solos, heartrending leads, narrative samples, and orchestral passages. Then, after 50 minutes, when most albums are coming to an end, you start "The Shadow Man Incident," a nearly 20-minute feast of cinematic progressions, experimental flourishes and exotic rhythms.
"Shadow Man" is one of my favorite tracks. I really enjoyed, not just writing the music, but making the lyrics as well, because the topic was so intriguing. So, we had the best of all worlds — the perfect backdrop to explore the story line.

What's it about?
Sleep paralysis, which is a really interesting phenomenon. People who suffer from it are awake and they can see and hear but they can't move. It's like there's a demon on their chest holding them down, and some people who go through it — and there have been tons of reports over centuries — claim they've seen this ominous figure that's been called the Shadow Man.

"Dead Asleep," the second-longest track (11 minutes), starts as a haunting lullaby and then evolves into heavy riffs punctuated with pick harmonics before bounding off in a more ethereal and melodic direction.
When I wrote the chord progressions for the beginning and the end of that, I was thinking about Randy Rhoads, and how he would create these dark, dreamy chord progressions on the Ozzy Osbourne album *Diary of a Madman*. Everything else stemmed from that.

Was there anything new you wanted to do with guitars on *Parasomnia*?
I wanted to infuse some different tonal elements to the riff writing and the chord progressions. So I started studying some things I hadn't done before — different types of scales, different types of chords, and chord movement.

> "WE'RE NOT AFRAID TO DO STUFF SOME OTHER BANDS WON'T TRY. WE'VE EARNED THE LICENSE TO DO ANYTHING"

Can you be more specific?
In "Night Terror," I wrote the riffs and main guitar solo trying to stick to this mode called Super Phrygian, which added a weird tonal element. I also did some classical things, in which a song doesn't ever resolve to the root until the end, which is a cool technique that creates a more dreamy sound. I used really weird things like the Tristan chord and the Prometheus chord to give some of the songs a mystical vibe. When I did my homework for the album, I studied a lot of eight-note scales as well.

Do you work on different parts for different songs at the same time and build them as you go along or do you prefer to write a full song before moving on to the next?
We'll work on one song at a time and try to finish it. But as we're writing, sometimes we'll go off on a tangent that doesn't necessarily make sense for that song. At the end of "Bend the Clock" there's a long Pink Floyd-y David Gilmour-inspired guitar solo that came out of a jam we were doing, and it stemmed from this bass part John started playing. It was so cool, but we knew it wouldn't fit into the song we were working

on, so we documented it and put it aside to work with later. That happens from time to time. But mostly, we focus hard on one song at a time, perfect it, and get the drum performance recorded. Otherwise, we'd have a whole pile of material for a 70-minute record and we'd have to go back and try to remember how the hell we played everything. When we get the drum performance down, we also record scratch tracks, so now we have more than just a skeleton, we have the full song done and it's just a matter of going back in and getting the overdubs done.

Parts of the instrumental overture, "In the Arms of Morpheus" and "The Shadow Man Incident" would sound great in a film soundtrack.
A lot of that comes from studying John Williams and trying to understand his epic, cinematic compositions. On the first vocal sections and verses of "Shadow Man," the chord progressions are really strange and have some weird resolutions and key changes. And you can hear it in "Morpheus," too, when the eight-string guitar kicks in. That chord that we whack after the F♯ downbeat is the Prometheus chord I was talking about, which is a series of tritones. And that's something else I have been working on.

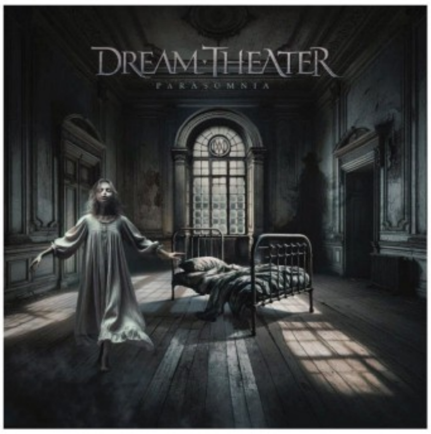
Why did you play an eight-string guitar on the overture?
We wrote the whole record and then decided to go back and make the listening experience more like *The Dark Side of the Moon* and create little musical and narrative connections between the songs. So, we wrote an overture that encompasses all of these melodies on the record. I had not used the eight-string yet, so I tried it and I was like, "This thing sounds great!" Just as soon as it kicks in, all hell breaks loose.

You played a seven-string in "The Shadow Man Incident." Was everything else played on six strings?
Yes, but I mixed up the tunings, which I haven't done since *Train of Thought* [*2003*]. "Night Terror" and "Bend the Clock" use standard tuning, but "Dead Asleep" is in drop B♭, which was inspired by Zakk Wylde, who joined me at my Guitar Universe Camp. We jammed on a bunch of Black Label Society and Ozzy stuff. Zakk is always playing in drop B♭, where you tune to C and you drop the [*lowest string*] down to B♭. "Midnight Messiah" is in C, and "A Broken Man" is tuned down to D.

Did you use a variety of new and vintage guitars?
It's all my Ernie Ball Music Man Signature Majesty. I used the eight-, seven- and six-string versions. I used different agencies, but it's all on the Majesty. It does everything I need, whether it's a great clean sound, a heavy, tight percussive, riffy sound or a soaring, creamy lead sound. I have the bolt-on version of my Ernie Ball Music Man JP15, which is amazing. And we have the neck-through version, which is now celebrating its 10th anniversary.

Are you trying out any new right-handed techniques?
There's this hyper-speed alternate picking style I was trying to do for a while and finally got the hang of. You hear that a few times on the album, most noticeably right in the middle of "Night Terror."

There's some flashy interplay between the guitar and keyboards that almost sounds like guitar harmonies.
Jordan [*Rudess*] and I do it in "Night Terror" in the first instrumental break before the main guitar. And we do it again on "Midnight Messiah." It's a right-hand tapping Van Halen hammer-on technique that we're harmonizing. I like to think of it as our version of a "Highway Star" unison-type harmony. And we also do some unison stuff in "Shadow Man," in the Latin music-influenced section.



"PEOPLE WHO SUFFER FROM [SLEEP PARALYSIS] ARE AWAKE; THEY CAN SEE AND HEAR, BUT THEY CAN'T MOVE"

What inspired you to break into a Latin-inspired part?
One morning, as I would often do, I got to the studio before the guys, picked up my guitar, and started writing this really fast, galloping, tight riff. And that's what the Latin part morphs into. So, that fast part came first, and I don't know why I put this Latin-y thing in front of it. John was doing this line on bass, and somehow that sent me off into this vibey thing. It popped out of me and we all liked it.

You've never held back from abrupt sonic shifts. Is that part of the appeal of writing for Dream Theater?
Doing something that totally interrupts the flow of the song is just us having fun. We're like, "Hey, let's take them down this road instead," so we put a twist in that surprises the listener and the song takes a sudden left turn. Some people might be thinking, "What? Why the hell did you do that?" But doing something that's melodic or straightforward, then playing something far more complex, then switch to something that swings or has a funky or jazzy vibe to it, and then morphing that into something that's full-on Latin-sounding, is a lot of why I love Dream Theater. We're not afraid to do stuff some other bands won't try. We've earned the license to do anything. There are no rules so you don't have to worry about how long a song is, how many styles you play, or whether it's going to be a hit or not.

With all the lofty expectations from fans, did you feel under the gun to deliver?
There was pressure, but I think it was self-inflicted. You'd have to be dumb not to be aware of the anticipation that the announcement created in our fans, and we knew people would be looking forward to hearing what we could come up with. But thinking about all of that before we even walked into the studio was inspiring and pushed us to want to do our best. There was a real incentive to figure out how we could take this album to a level that's going to be undeniable. And when I say undeniable, it's not only how other people perceive it, but how we perceive it as a band when we're working on it.

Does *Parasomnia* feel like a musical rebirth?
In a way, it does. It's our 16th album, and it comes after our 40th year as a band. Those benchmark moments have created new enthusiasm, and renewed energy, and we're all vibing on the anticipation that those moments bring. We're thinking, "Man, this is an amazing time in our career. Let's make sure we rise to the occasion."

HIGH TIME

MC5

The new **MC5** album took more than 50 years to arrive. The band members have all passed on, but the celebration is just beginning.

BY GARY GRAFF

ON STAGE AT El Club, a respectably divey club in his hometown of Detroit, for a Cinco de Mayo show in 2022, Wayne Kramer was preparing to play something more than 50 years in the making — a new MC5 song.

"Some bands take two years between albums," Kramer told a packed house at what was, in fact, the first show by a new MC5 lineup. "Some bands take five years between albums. We take 50." He then cranked up his famed American flag–painted Stratocaster to play the metallic riff that introduces "Heavy Lifting," the title track from what is the first MC5 album since 1971's *High Time*. It's a 13-track set that fits the band's legacy well. From its boldly topical lyricism to a guitar assault led by Kramer — with guest appearances from Tom Morello, Slash, Vernon Reid, Rise Against's Tim McIlrath, Steve Salas and Soundgarden's Kim Thayil — *Heavy Lifting* is a true testimonial to the original troupe's jam-kicking power.

But much has changed in the two-and-a-half-year interim since that show. Kramer passed away from pancreatic cancer on February 2, in Los Angeles, at the age of 75. Two months later to the day, John Sinclair, MC5's manager and mentor, also died. With MC5's three other members — Rob Tyner, Fred "Sonic" Smith and Michael Davis — gone years before, that left drummer Dennis "Machine Gun" Thompson as the band's only living member, and he died on May 9, also aged 75, after suffering a debilitating heart attack the month before.

Sadly, his death came less than three weeks after the announcement that MC5 would receive an Award for

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

Musical Achievement from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame after six previous unsuccessful nominations.

> “WAYNE DIED BEFORE HE HAD A CHANCE TO SEE WHAT PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THIS AND HAVE THE JOY OF DOING IT IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE”
>
> BOB EZRIN

If all that places a bit of a pall over the arrival of *Heavy Lifting*, however, those involved with finishing it are sworn to make sure the record’s release is a celebration, not a wake.

“The tragedy of all this,” *Heavy Lifting* producer Bob Ezrin says, “is that, because it took so long to get through all of the things on the business side, we missed being able to release it in Wayne’s lifetime. It’s also tragic that we missed having him be able to take it on the road. He was so looking forward to that, ’cause all the stuff was really fun to play, even in the studio. I’m still saddened by the fact that he died before he had a chance to see what people think about this and have the joy of doing it in front of an audience.”

For Brad Brooks, who co-wrote 10 of *Heavy Lifting*’s tracks and is the album’s primary singer, its release “is really super bittersweet, ’cause Wayne is not here. He and I had been talking so much about this coming year, and he was so excited. Losing Wayne’s a big hole in my life. It’s been very, very hard. But I’m so excited the album is coming out, and I’m pretty proud of what we did.

“But it also makes me sad because he should be here. It also kind of pisses me off. He should’ve been here way longer.”

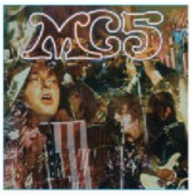
The same, of course, could be said about the Motor City 5. Although *Heavy Lifting* is billed under the band’s name, the quintet’s original run lasted from 1963 to ’72, and they were a recording act for only four of those years. The MC5 formed in the blue-collar Detroit suburb of Lincoln Park, inspired by early rock and roll, Motown and James Brown, though later they picked up on John Coltrane, Sun Ra and other free-jazz improvisational influences. Their debut album — recorded live in concert during a Halloween weekend stand at Detroit’s Grande Ballroom — was named for the proto-punk anthem and statement of intent “Kick Out the Jams,” but the same performance concluded with the eight-minute-plus “Starship,” a screaming freak-out co-credited to Sun Ra.

“I think the band represented a sense of unlimited possibilities — that there could be a new kind of music and a new kind of politics, that there could be a new kind of lifestyle,” Kramer said in 2018 while celebrating the 50th anniversary of the *Kick Out the Jams* concerts. He would go on to recount the band’s saga in the *Heavy Lifting* track “The Edge of a Switchblade.” “Like any generation, we saw a seismic shift in the way we approached life. I think that spirit that anything is possible held up pretty well.”

“I believe the impact of the MC5 on all the subsequent rock and roll cannot be overstated,” says Don Was, the Grammy Award–winning producer who plays bass on most of *Heavy Lifting*. He was a longtime friend of Kramer’s as well, having attended MC5 shows at the Grande and collaborated with him starting with the earliest recordings of his band Was (Not Was), circa 1979. “They may not have sold many records, but it’s one of those bands where everyone who listened to them went out and started a band of their own. They were a very unique, very important band.”

John Sinclair was particularly impressed by the guitar tandem of Kramer and Smith when he began managing MC5. “They were very versatile for a couple of thugs from Lincoln Park,” he remarked shortly after Kramer’s death. “They had a special thing I never saw anybody else have, not even the Rolling Stones. They had their minds on big things. They wanted to be great… And they were willing to put in the work to do that.”

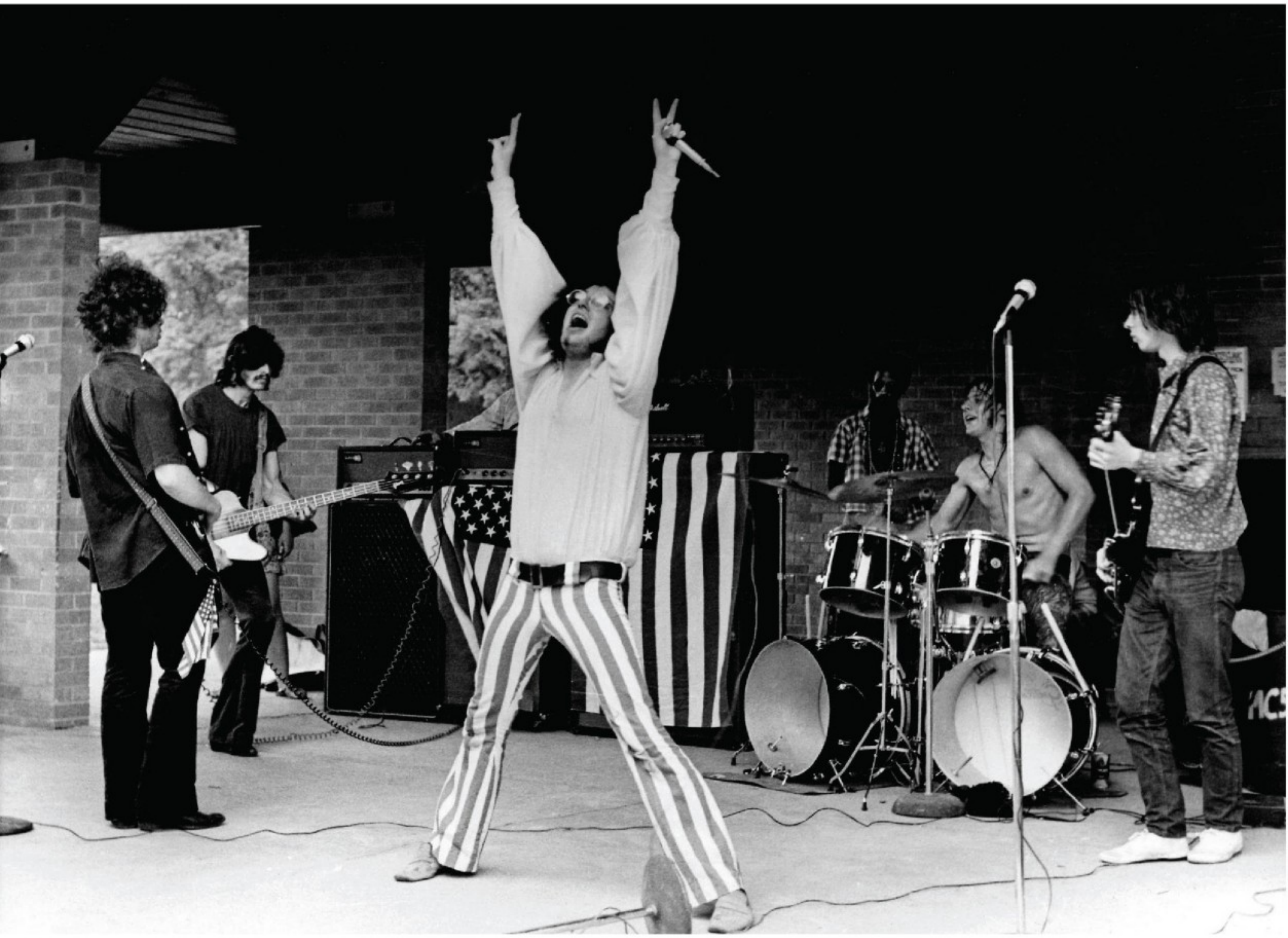
Those qualities connected as well with a young William DuVall, who would go on to join Alice in Chains in 2006. “The MC5 for me were like superheroes when I was about 11 years old,” says DuVall, who sings “The Edge of the Switchblade” alongside Slash. “They sort of fit perfectly into the nexus that I was already



ABOVE: Recorded at Detroit’s Grande Ballroom, *Kick Out the Jams* was a high-powered live debut that defined the MC5’s hard-rock sound and anti-establishment political stance.

OPENING PAGE: The MC5 circa 1969: (from front to back) singer Rob Tyner, drummer Dennis “Machine Gun” Thompson, guitarists Wayne Kramer and Fred “Sonic” Smith (back right), and bassist Michael Davis.

BELOW: Tyner looks on as Kramer plays a Les Paul ’Burst, in 1967. The guitar was later stolen. Kramer went on to play a white Fender Strat, which he modified with a humbucker in the middle position. He eventually gave the guitar its iconic American flag finish.



The group perform at West Park, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1968. Just as Kramer had adopted the Stars and Stripes for his guitar, the MC5 made the American flag a central image of their stage act in defiance of those who found their anti-war stance unpatriotic. "I said, 'Hey, not so fast. This is my flag, too,'" Kramer told Guitar. com's Justin Beckner in 2023 of his decision to paint the flag on his guitar. "'I don't support this war and it's my patriotic duty to say, I don't agree with what the govern-ment is doing.'"

LENI SINCLAIR/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES (THIS PAGE); LENI SINCLAIR/GETTY IMAGES (OPPOSITE)

exploring: the nexus between really high-energy rock and free jazz. I couldn't have scripted a cooler band from where I was sitting at the time. Just total freedom."

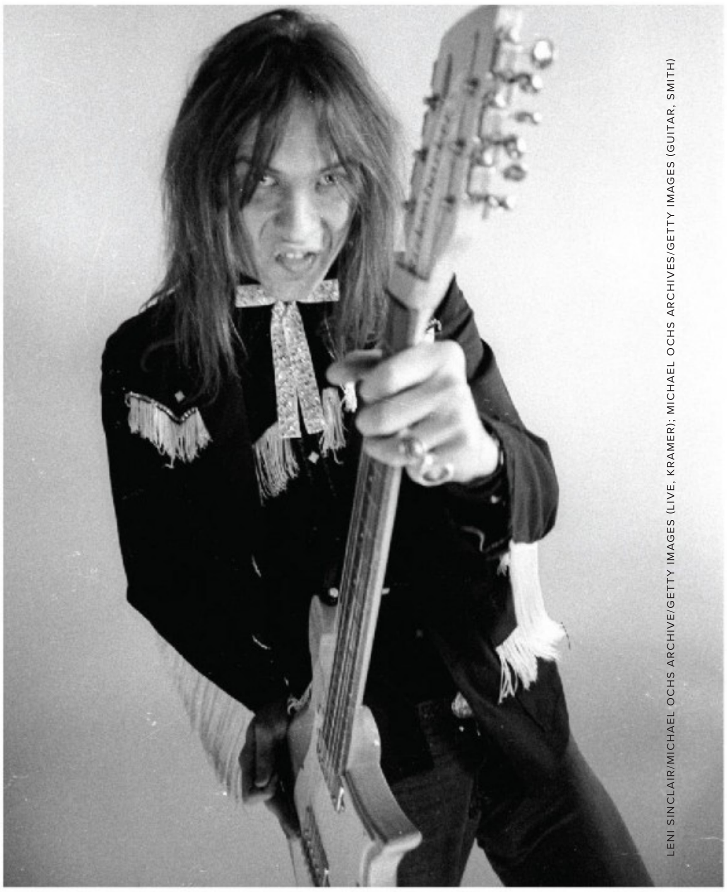
MC5 made their mark both musically and politically. One significant show included an ill-fated performance outside the Democratic party's violence-marred national convention during 1968 in Chicago. They became the musical mouthpiece for the Sinclair-led White Panther Party, an adjunct to the Black Panthers, whose 10-point manifesto advocated, among other things, "total assault on the culture by any means necessary, including rock and roll, dope and fucking in the streets."

But the group imploded at the end of 1972, plowed under by pressures both external (police, record companies) and internal (drugs, mental health, acrimony)."I lost my brothers," Kramer recalled. "We went our separate ways, like [*the band*] never happened. Denial on a large scale."

> "I THINK THE BAND REPRESENTED A SENSE OF UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES THAT THERE COULD BE A NEW KIND OF MUSIC AND A NEW KIND OF POLITICS"
>
> WAYNE KRAMER

He killed that pain with some music but also drugs, eventually dealing and landing in the FMC Lexington Prison in Kentucky, in 1975.

The tide changed there. In jail he met jazz trumpeter Red Rodney, who played with Charlie Parker and became a "musical father" to Kramer, expanding his vistas and ambitions with what he called "a Berklee School of Music course in writing and arranging." Upon his release, he felt inspired again. He started a solo career with *The Hard Stuff* in 1995 and worked with the likes of Bad Religion, Pere Ubu, Mudhoney, Marshall Crenshaw and others. He began scoring film and TV shows as well, started the record label MuscleTone with his wife, Margaret Saadi Kramer, and launched a U.S. wing of British troubadour Billy Bragg's Jail Guitar Doors music therapy initiative for inmates.



LENI SINCLAIR/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES (LIVE, KRAMER); MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (GUITAR, SMITH)

MC5 BACK IN THE USA

ABOVE: Future Bruce Springsteen producer Jon Landau persuaded the MC5 to move in a more straight-ahead rock direction for *Back in the USA*, their second album and first studio effort. Released in January 1970, it was the group's first record with Atlantic Records. Elektra Records had dropped them the year before after the MC5 took out a full-page ad denouncing the Detroit-area department store Hudson's for refusing to stock *Kick Out the Jams* due to its use of profanity.

OPPOSITE TOP: The MC5 perform in Mount Clemens, Michigan, 1969.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM, COUNTER-CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Kramer's guitar; Kramer poses before an American flag in East Lansing, Michigan, 1969; co-guitarist Fred "Sonic" Smith hoists the Rickenbacker 450/12 12-string that was his main guitar during his years with the MC5.

Kramer never let go of the MC5, either. During 2004 he, Thompson and Davis toured as DKT/MC5 with a corps of guest musicians, Was among them. And in 2018, on the heels of his memoir *The Hard Stuff* (and a bout with saliva gland cancer), Kramer formed MC50, touring with Thayil and fellow Soundgarden alumnus Matt Cameron, Fugazi's Brendan Canty, Faith No More's Billy Gould and others.

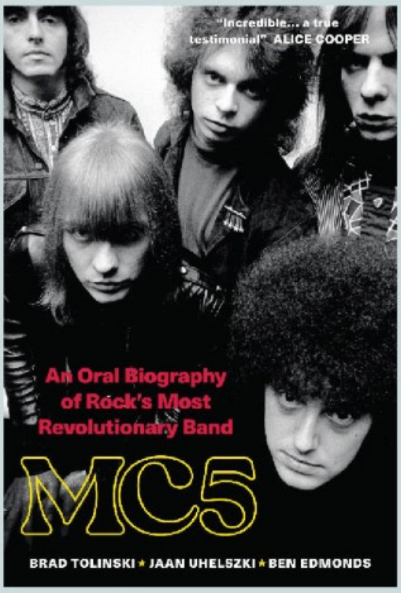
"This is very much a continuation," he explained at the time. "These guys have carried the message of the MC5 all the years, the message of self-determination and self-efficacy and all things are possible if you put in the work. They all live by that message and they're playing their asses off. In a lot of ways it's the realization of the spark that happened 50 years ago at the Grande Ballroom in Detroit, to have a band that produces these high-energy rock shows that completely blow people's minds, like it's come to fruition."

The MC50 troupe did record a new version of "Kick Out the Jams" that's a bonus on *Heavy Lifting*, and Kramer did not rule out the possibility of creating new music under the MC5 moniker. But the real impetus came during 2020, from the dual punch of the pandemic and more than three years of the Donald Trump presidency, which was anathema to everything MC5 stood for.

"I went into a real pit of despair," Kramer acknowledged during the spring of 2022, "and fortunately I have a wonderful therapist who told me, 'Basta, Wayne! Basta! Get up! Go do something creative. Now, today!' So I called up [*Brooks*] and said, 'Hey, you want to try to write some songs?' and we wrote a couple, and it was fun and it sounded pretty good and we wrote a few more, and they were sounding better and better, and the whole thing kind of snowballed on its own."

Kramer had also been working with Alice Cooper on his *Breadcrumbs* EP and *Detroit Stories* album, produced by Ezrin, with whom he shared his own new music. "Everybody was saying, 'Boy, this could be an MC5 record,'" Kramer recalled. "The more I thought about it… We were in such a dangerous time for our country, I thought, I'm gonna have to pull out all the stops and use the most powerful tools that I have at my disposal. And the MC5 always represented action and commitment and principle, and I think we're gonna need all of that and more if our democracy is going to survive."

Ezrin says Kramer first approached him about a film and album project that was also called *Heavy Lifting*, which the producer describes as "this very elaborate story about some criminals and about a heist and sticking it to the man and so on." The larger concept seemed like a big lift, but the music… not so much.


"Incredible... a true testimonial" ALICE COOPER
An Oral Biography of Rock's Most Revolutionary Band
MC5
BRAD TOLINSKI ★ JAAN UHELSZKI ★ BEN EDMONDS

BOOK 'EM, DANNO

The life and times of Detroit's unruly firebrands are entered for the record in a new and definitive biography.

THE NEW MC5 album is called *Heavy Lifting*, but that would have been an equally fine name for the just-released tome *MC5: An Oral Biography of Rock's Most Revolutionary Band.* The book was painstakingly compiled by writers Brad Tolinski and Jaan Uhelszki using the late rock scribe Ben Edmonds' recorded interviews with the proto-punk Detroit rockers.

Tolinski and Uhelszki are no strangers to this territory. Both are Detroit natives who made their mark in rock journalism: Uhelszki as a co-founding editor of Detroit's legendary *Creem* magazine, and Tolinski as the longtime editor of *Guitar World* magazine and the author of the celebrated rock tomes *Eruption: Conversations with Eddie Van Halen*, *Light & Shade: Conversations with Jimmy Page*, and *Play It Loud*. The duo inherited the project from Edmonds — a one-time *Creem* editor and U.S. correspondent for *Mojo* magazine — following his death in 2016.

What emerges is a candid and at times surprisingly funny portrait of a politically revolutionary and uncompromising rock act. The book's 304 pages include appearances by 1960s icons like fellow Detroit act Iggy and the Stooges, Jimi Hendrix and John Lennon, as well as political and social activists like Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, revealing the full scope of the MC5's influence and celebrity in rock's original revolutionary era.

***MC5: An Oral Biography of Rock's Most Revolutionary Band* is out now in hardcover.**

> "THEY WERE VERY VERSATILE FOR A COUPLE OF THUGS FROM LINCOLN PARK"
>
> JOHN SINCLAIR

"I thought this could be an MC5 project. Forget about the movie — what I would be more interested in would be creating a new MC5 album," Ezrin says. "And it took [*Kramer*] really no time at all to come to the right conclusion, which was, Yes, of course what we need is an MC5 album, and of course that's what we need today in this world, in this America we live in today. We need that voice."

Some may have raised eyebrows about using the band name again (MC50 was its own kind of sidestep), but Kramer explained that "the MC5 never had a band agreement, so we all held the trademark. If the estate of Michael Davis wants to make an MC5 record, they're well within their rights to do that." But Kramer also sought to differentiate what he was doing by doing it under the banner of "We are all MC5," a campaign that expanded the parameters of what was going on.

"My feeling was MC5 wasn't five individuals," Ezrin explains. "MC5 was a state of consciousness, a state of mind and, in a way, a political position. So what I said to Wayne was, 'Listen, we are all MC5. We all come from that place... So in that sense anybody who wants to join and anybody who wants to take up the mantle here for not just musical reasons but also philosophical reasons, those people would be more than welcome.

"It was easy for me to say — I'm not an original member of the band. But looking at it as a fan, my feeling was that anybody who wanted to line up behind this banner was MC5. And that's what ended up happening."

It's a position Kramer was comfortable with. "If you look at what the artist's role in social change could be, it's to carry a message," he said in 2022. "What the MC5's done since inception is to carry a message of self-efficacy, of taking action. We're not handing out the jams or passing out the jams — we're kicking out the motherfucking jams! This is about action — get up off the couch, go do something. If we don't step up and make sure that we barricade our rights, then all the things we all love about living in America are gonna go away."

Brooks met Kramer during the spring of 2019 at a Jeff Buckley tribute event in his home base of Oakland, California, and they became fast friends, bonding over their shared cancer and child-raising experiences. They began writing together during 2020,

Sax and violence. MC5, with manager John Sinclair (far left), pose with instruments and guns, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1969.

LENI SINCLAIR/GETTY IMAGES

Performing at the Grande Ballroom in 1969. Local DJ Russ Gibb acquired the Detroit club in 1966 as a venue for rock acts, having been inspired by a visit to Bill Graham's Fillmore Auditorium (later the Fillmore West) in San Francisco. In addition to hosting local acts like the MC5, Ted Nugent, the Stooges and the Alice Cooper Group, the Grande booked international artists that included Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Cream and the Who.

LENI SINCLAIR/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

for the initial *Heavy Lifting* film concept, and Brooks well remembers getting the call. “Wayne said, ‘Hey, Brad, we're making an MC5 record. You're the singer of MC5,’” he recalls. “And I'm like, ‘Hold on bro…’”

As Brooks explains, the songs he and Kramer wrote were focused on current topics. “It's not a retro record,” he says. “It was written about 2021, about the rise of Trump, George Floyd, the [*January 6*] insurrection, about the homeless situation after COVID. It had to be about now; [*MC5*] was always about now. They were all very observant cats about the times they were in. I was writing honestly about Oakland, but it does translate to Detroit and everywhere else, and to the state of the world.

“I felt a responsibility to honor the [*MC5*] name, and honor those guys and their commitment to the music and their commitment to the times.”

As for the musical approach, Brooks says Kramer “wanted to see what would be a more modern version of *High Time*… I was always talking to him about the Yardbirds' *Roger the Engineer*, and Parliament-Funkadelic. ‘Change No Change’ we thought had a [*Marvin Gaye*] ‘Trouble Man’ vibe to it. That song is interesting because it's pretty much the demo Wayne made. I feel like it captured the feeling of what I was seeing, and it's still there.”

For his part Ezrin, along with Kramer, was after “that combination of funk, punk and power that was Detroit,” and of course part of the MC5's makeup. Demos were exchanged, along with exacting suggestions and tweaks to tighten arrangements and refine lyrics. Tracking sessions with Kramer, Was and Paul McCartney's drummer, Abe Laboriel Jr., took less than a week during November 2021 at Waystation studio in Coldwater Canyon. Studio owner and engineer Dave Way says the recording was “one of the best sessions of my 35-year career. Everybody was happy to be there and brought their very best. And they're all badasses.”

“Having [*Was and Laboriel*] and Wayne on the floor meant there were fireworks from the first note,” recalls Ezrin, who co-wrote the *Heavy Lifting* tracks “Blind Eye” and “Barbarians at the Gate.” “They spurred each other on. They inspired each other. We had the demos so we knew the songs.
We weren't forced to work out the shape of the material. They developed and perfected their parts fairly quickly, together. They just got each other, and I pushed, like I do, to keep the energy level up and keep it alive.”

> “EVERYONE WHO LISTENED TO THEM WENT OUT AND STARTED A BAND OF THEIR OWN”
>
> DON WAS

Was remembers that “there was never any pretense of, ‘Now you're the bass player in the MC5.’ It was, ‘We're making a record that's meant to shine a light on the legacy and keep the ethos alive.” In doing that, he notes that, “I did think a lot about Michael Davis” and Davis's isolated bass tracks that Kramer had provided for Was to study during the MC50 dates.

“The thing that really blew my mind was how much R&B there was in his bass playing,” Was says. “He listened very carefully to [*Motown funk brother*] James Jamerson, I think. There's a lot of nuanced groove that gets washed away in the sea of guitar when you hear the mixes. I suspect that's one reason why Wayne called me; I do think that particular way of blending R&B and rock and roll is a Detroit thing. I think he knew that's where I come from.”

Both Ezrin and Brooks say Kramer's approach was characteristically straightforward and clean. Most of the album was played with his signature Stratocaster, although Ezrin notes that Kramer was “a quintessential guitar guy. He had a lot of other axes to choose from when we were looking for different sounds and stuff.”

Kramer and Kim Thayil (right) perform on the MC50 tour at Alcatraz, in Milan, Italy, November 21, 2018.

SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

But, Brooks adds with a laugh, "Wayne's not a pedal guy, right? He'll use effects here and there, but his studio is filled with pedals that he's never used."

"SOME BANDS TAKE FIVE YEARS BETWEEN ALBUMS. WE TAKE 50"

WAYNE KRAMER

That doesn't mean Kramer's playing is simple by any measure, Ezrin cautions. "Wayne is such a versatile and interestingly schooled guitar player," he says. "He had a really great sense of rhythm. He channels his inner Motown star and has a very R&B approach to things, rhythmically, so he's very funky. And then once he studied jazz, he became not only funky and punky but he also had some harmonically sophisticated constructs with the songs on the record, moments in some of the songs that are on a high level, from my point of view.

"He's very good at coming up with riffs, too. Riffs are not very easy, especially the simple ones. They're very much like a motif is in classical music. But he's a great riff man. When you listen to 'Boys Play With Matches,' from the new album, that guitar riff — that's fantastic!"

Soundgarden's Thayil — who calls MC5 "probably my favorite band" — gained his own appreciation for Kramer's method while playing alongside the guitarist in MC50. "It's a little bit more involved than I thought," acknowledges Thayil, whose playing is featured on an alternate mix of "The Edge of a Switchblade." "Just offhand, from listening to the albums, the songs all seem pretty simple, like, three-chord songs that are just pounding their way repetitively. But the arrangements are dynamic, so there are little rhythmic emphases here and there to kind of break it up. When you're young, you don't understand that. It takes a while to recognize and learn nuance and dynamics, and there's a lot of that in [*Wayne's*] playing, in MC5 and after."

Once *Heavy Lifting*'s basic tracks were together, Kramer and Ezrin began reaching out to guests for overdubs. "We would discuss it, have a conversation," Ezrin remembers. "In most cases they were friends of Wayne's that we were reaching out to. They would discuss what it was Wayne and I had agreed we were missing and that we were looking for. Wayne would give them their marching orders. They would send me samples and examples of what it was they were about to do and we'd make adjustments. And sometimes it would be perfect and amazing."

Living Colour's Vernon Reid met Kramer prior to the pandemic, when both were instructors at one of Morello's guitar workshops. Reid was surprised and

HIGH
MC5
TIME

ABOVE: Released in 1971, *High Time* was the original lineup's final album. Despite good reviews, it was badly promoted and didn't sell. The band sputtered along for another year before breaking up after a poorly attended farewell show at the Grande Ballroom on New Year's Eve, 1972.

BELOW: Kramer and Tom Morello perform during the Road Recovery benefit concert at the Nokia Times Square, New York City, May 1, 2009.

happy to be asked to play on the track "Can't Be Found," one of two that also feature MC5 drummer Dennis Thompson. "The idea of an MC5 record… you can't take something like that lightly," Reid says. "I didn't. But Wayne was such an encouraging person. He's a positive, feisty dude. He was kind of like, 'Do *you!* Do what you feel. Don't think.' So I listened to it and tried to absorb the tune and get a vibe for it, and it worked out."

Morello, meanwhile, was one of the first guests involved in the project. He co-wrote *Heavy Lifting*'s title track and plays on it as well. "When I found out the song was co-written by him, it was a foregone conclusion he was gonna play on it," Ezrin says. "And of course I got him to sing on it, too, on the chorus."

Slash was similarly "an easy ask" for "The Edge of the Switchblade." "It was exactly the right song for him to be part of," Ezrin says. "I didn't have to say anything; what I wanted was pure Slash, just 'Go be yourself. Play like you play musically. It's a simple progression.' It just called for that kind of Slash sensibility.

JOE KOHEN/WIREIMAGE

> "THE MC5 FOR ME WERE LIKE SUPERHEROES WHEN I WAS ABOUT 11 YEARS OLD. JUST TOTAL FREEDOM"
>
> **WILLIAM DUVALL**

DuVall, another veteran of the DKT/MC5 shows, says he was "honored" to be vocalizing Kramer's story about the band and channeled his pre-adolescent fandom into his performance. "I was just going for that thing I feel like Rob Tyner and the entire band were able to embody, which is that bridge between soul and rock and roll and, of course, experimental music, free jazz, high-energy kind of ecstatic music. I still feel like that soul/rock and roll junction is firmly there, and so I tried to bring that, which is natural for me to do anyway."

Ezrin feels it's also important that Thompson, who recorded his drum parts back in Michigan, contributed to *Heavy Lifting*. "He was one of the most important drummers of the era and obviously an original member, an OG — the only one left standing beside Wayne at that point," the producer says. "So it was very important that we got both of them on the record to the extent that we could, and I think Dennis did a really good job."

Fans got their first taste of *Heavy Lifting* when Kramer released the title track in conjunction with the 2022 spring tour of the Brooks-fronted MC5 lineup, which Kramer called "the best band yet." The group was also playing "The American Ruse," another politically pointed song that did not make the final track list. "There were other songs that were part of the other [*movie*] project," Ezrin notes. "But from the time we were in the studio until the end, it was the same group of songs."

Heavy Lifting comes out amidst a spate of MC5 activity this fall. In addition to the long overdue Rock Hall honor, a new book, *MC5: An Oral Biography of Rock's Most Revolutionary Band* [*see sidebar on page 67*] — comprised of the late Ben Edmonds' original interviews and finished by Detroit-born writers Brad Tolinski and Jaan Uhelszki — has been published. And, fittingly, the group will be honored in its hometown of Lincoln Park. Kramer's absence will be felt, as will Sinclair's, Thompson's and the other band members — but the *Heavy Lifting* team is confident that the album will stand as a fitting finale and one last set of vital jams kicked out under the MC5 banner.

"I'm gratified that when we finished the album, Wayne sent me a note and just said, 'This is great. I love it,' and I feel really good about that," Brooks says. "We didn't finish with any regrets. He loved every song, every mix, and all of us were excited about it. That he was happy, satisfied, excited and fulfilled by the process and by the record itself — that's great. I feel good that I could play some role in helping him to realize one of his dreams."

VIDEO & AUDIO https://bit.ly/3QPJWk7

PLAY LIKE...
The Rolling Stones

In the wake of their chart-topping album, *Hackney Diamonds*, **Andy Saphir** celebrates the styles of this great band's guitarists: Brian Jones, Keith Richards, Mick Taylor, and Ronnie Wood.

ABILITY RATING Moderate ★★★☆☆

Info https://bit.ly/3QPJWk7
Key Various **Tempo** Various

Will improve your...
✓ Blues-rock vocabulary
✓ Slide playing
✓ Open-tuned rhythm playing

The Rolling Stones have been around since 1962 so this is their seventh decade making music. With such a long history, the iconic band has a massive body of work, to which has been added their latest album, *Hackney Diamonds*.

Starting out as a London-based blues group, The Stones achieved phenomenal worldwide success mixing pop, rock and blues, crafting their own unique sound that's stood the test of time with classic songs like Jumpin' Jack Flash, Honky Tonk Women and Angie which, even decades on, still sound fresh and exciting.

The Stones have always been a two-guitar outfit, with the legendary Keith Richards having been there from the beginning, partnered originally by Brian Jones who tragically drowned in his swimming pool in 1969. Jones was followed by ex John Mayall's Bluesbreakers guitarist, Mick Taylor, who in turn was replaced by Faces guitarist, Ronnie Wood in 1975.

Throughout their recorded works, the guitar sounds of The Rolling Stones have been a mix of electric and acoustic based, with references to the band's blues roots in cover versions of classic songs like I'm A King Bee and Little Red Rooster, with Richards, Jones, Taylor and Wood all contributing slide guitar in various songs too. Keith Richard's inspired guitar riffs have become the stuff of legend in songs like Jumpin' Jack Flash and Satisfaction, the latter of which was played using a Gibson Maestro FZ1 fuzz-tone pedal.

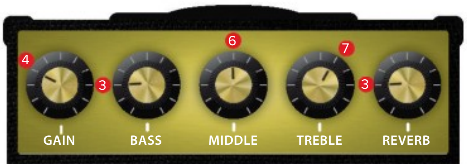
Perhaps one of the most recognisable musical sounds of The Rolling Stones is Richard's open tunings, where his guitar is tuned to open chords such as D, E or usually G, where he removes the sixth string; this can be heard on numerous songs, such as Honky Tonk Women and Start Me Up, and give a big, rich, immensely pleasing sound. These songs, among many others, would probably have been played using arguably Richard's most famously recognisable guitar, his 1950s Fender Telecaster, nicknamed Micawber, modified with a Gibson PAF humbucker in the neck position.

In this feature we'll be looking at the styles of all the Stones' guitarists, with examples featuring their individual approaches including their use of bluesy ideas such as mixing Minor and Major Pentatonic scales, country style flavours with the use of 6th interval shapes, and rock and roll influenced double-stops. We also look at Richards' open G-tuned rhythm style as well as some Brian Jones slide. There are also three 'mini pieces' which have a short rhythm guitar beginning followed by a solo. These are in three distinct musical flavours - a Major tonality piece, a Minor tonality piece and a blues style piece.

It's only rock and roll, etc, so have fun!

Mick, Ronnie and Keith in an early shot of the current Stones Line-up

LYNN GOLDSMITH / GETTY IMAGES



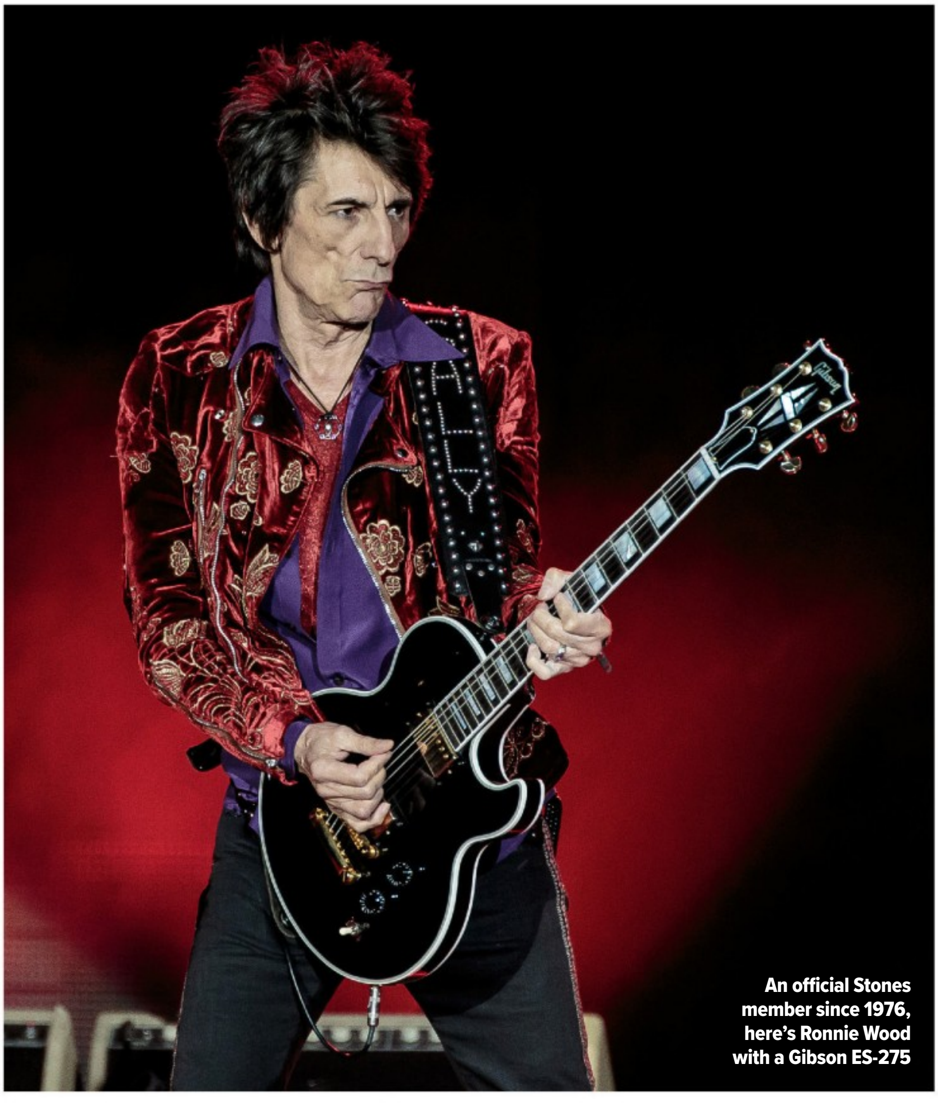
Get the Tone

Either a single-coil or humbucker equipped guitar can be used here, since all four guitarists regularly switched between the two. A higher action might be better suited to slide though. You can use anywhere from clean to light or medium overdrive for both rhythm and solo duties. Feel free to add reverb or a mild delay for ambient thickening.

TRACK RECORD With so many albums there is much material to choose from, but picking 'best of' albums like Forty Licks is a great place to start if you just want to hear the hits. Hearing the Stones live is a must, and Get Yer Ya Ya's Out! is a great live album released in 1970. Classic tracks like Honky Tonk Women and Start Me Up show off Keith's open G tuning, and Jumpin' Jack Flash is one of his own favourites.

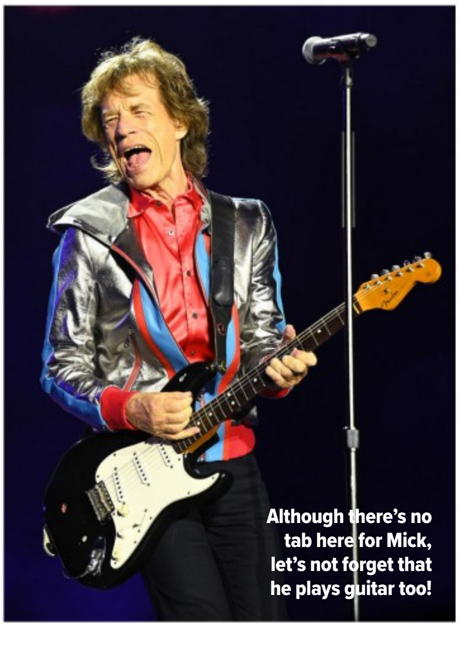
The multi-talented Stones founder Brian Jones playing his Vox Teardrop guitar

Mick Taylor joins The Stones on stage. Note his Les Paul with Bigsby



An official Stones member since 1976, here's Ronnie Wood with a Gibson ES-275

> *"Starting out as a London-based blues band, the Stones achieved phenomenal worldwide success by mixing pop, rock and blues and crafting their own unique sound"*



Although there's no tab here for Mick, let's not forget that he plays guitar too!

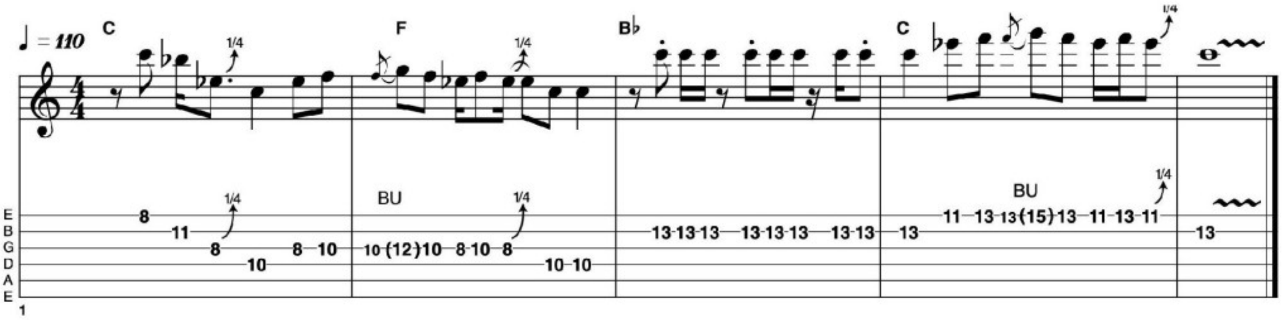
DAVID REDFERN/KEVIN MAZUR / SERGIONE INFUSO - CORBIS / DAVE J HOGAN / GETTY IMAGES

»

KEITH RICHARDS STYLE

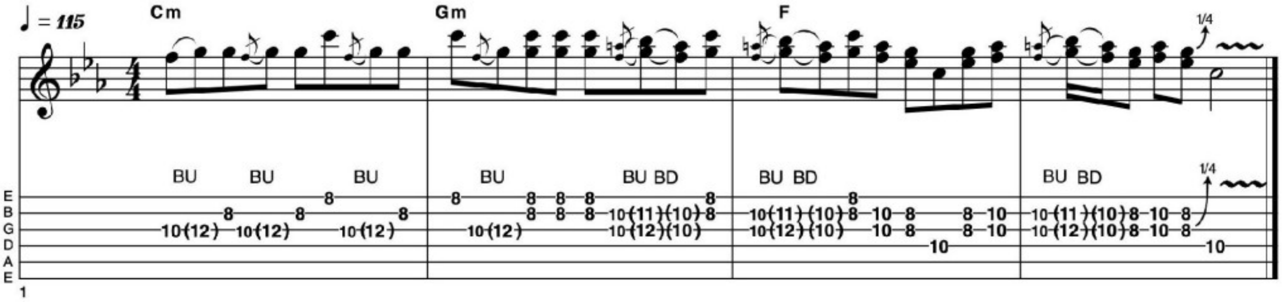
EXAMPLE **ONE**

This is in the key of C and features melodic C Minor Pentatonic licks (C-E♭-F-G-B♭) over the Major chords C, F and B♭.


♩ = 110
C
F
B♭
C
1/4
BU
E B G D A E

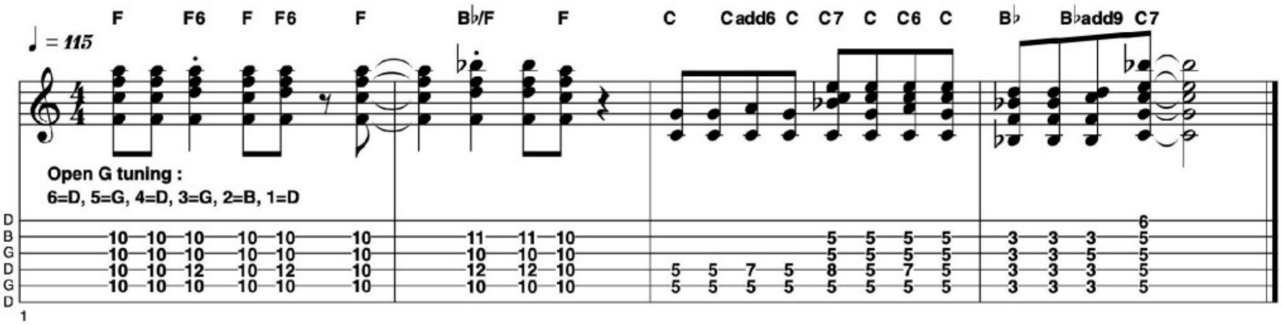
EXAMPLE **TWO**

This demonstrates Keith's rock and roll influence from players such as Chuck Berry. Make sure the third string's tone interval bends are accurate. The double-stop bends on the third and second strings in bars 2-4 can be achieved with either the third or fourth finger of the fretting hand pushing upwards, or the flat of the third finger pulling downwards. Either way, make sure the third string bends up a tone and the second string bends up a semitone.


♩ = 115
Cm
Gm
F
BU
BD
1/4
E B G D A E

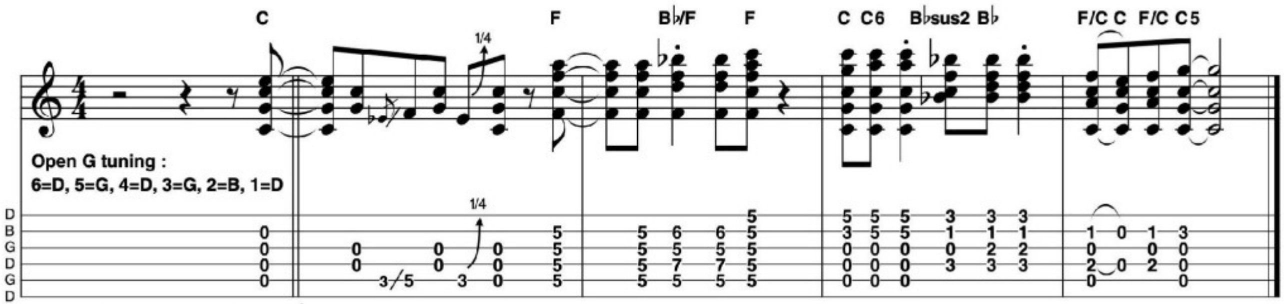
EXAMPLE **THREE**

This exercise demonstrates Keith's style of rhythm playing using open G tuning. Tuning as follows, low to high: D-G-D-F-B-D. However, Keith famously removes his sixth string for this tuning, so as to avoid unwanted sixth string noise completely. If you don't want to go to such lengths, simply mute the sixth string with the tip of your fretting hand's first finger when fretting the chords. Tuning it down to D of course, means if you do accidentally hit it, it's not a disaster.


♩ = 115
F
F6
F
F6
F
B♭/F
F
C
Cadd6
C
C7
C
C6
C
B♭
B♭add9
C7
Open G tuning :
6=D, 5=G, 4=D, 3=G, 2=B, 1=D
D B G D G D

EXAMPLE **FOUR**

An extension of the previous exercise, this one shows how the chords can be embellished with open-string runs and pull-offs to make for a more involved rhythm part. Keith used this idea in tracks like Tumbling Dice and Honky Tonk Women to create an instantly memorable sound.

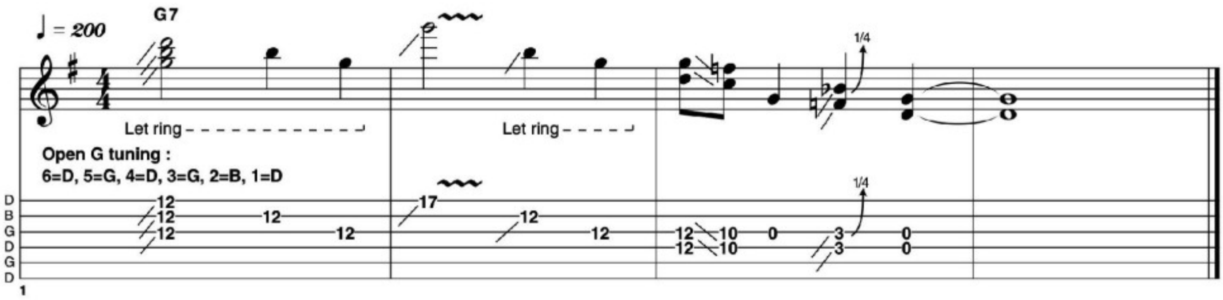

C
F
B♭/F
F
C
C6
B♭sus2
B♭
F/C
C
F/C
C5
1/4
Open G tuning :
6=D, 5=G, 4=D, 3=G, 2=B, 1=D
D B G D G D

Capo 5th fret = open strings in tab,
5th fret in tab is literal 10th fret

BRIAN JONES STYLE

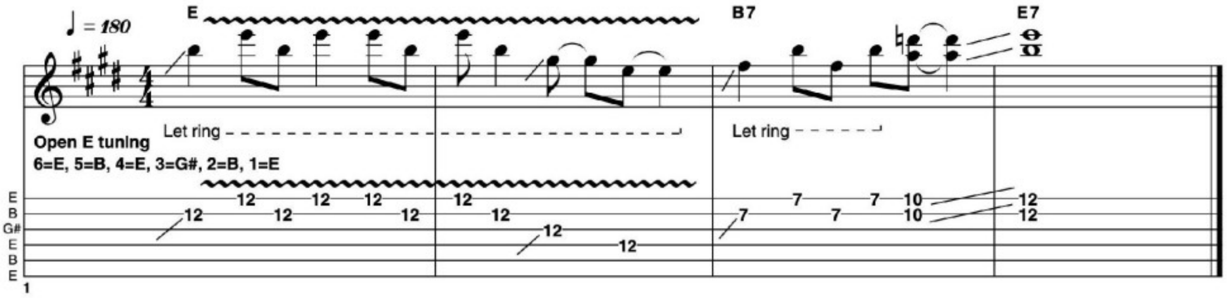
EXAMPLE **ONE**

This slide guitar example uses open G tuning and a clean guitar tone. Ensure correct pitching by placing the slide directly over the fret. Then add light vibrato.


♩ = 200
G7
Let ring
Let ring
1/4
Open G tuning :
6=D, 5=G, 4=D, 3=G, 2=B, 1=D
D B G D G D
1

EXAMPLE **TWO**

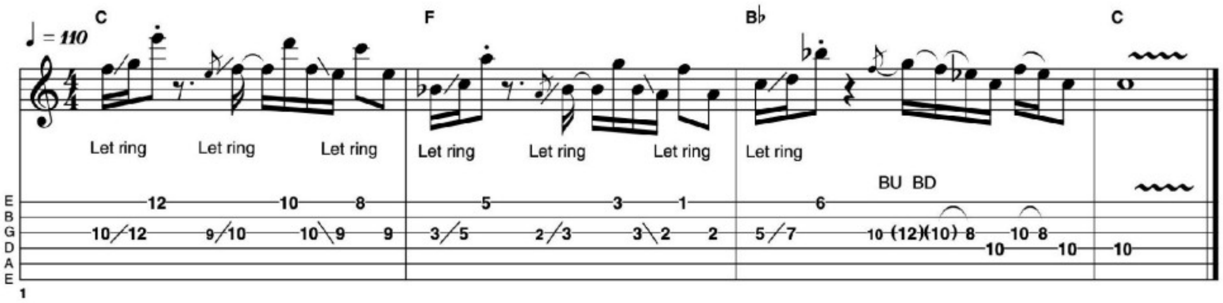
Another slide guitar example, this uses open E tuning. Tune the strings low to high: E-B-E-G#-B-E. A distorted guitar tone is used here and side-to-side slide vibrato. Brian was a natural musician, playing a number of instruments and styles. His slide guitar topped the charts on Little Red Rooster.


♩ = 180
E
B7
E7
Let ring
Let ring
Open E tuning
6=E, 5=B, 4=E, 3=G#, 2=B, 1=E
E B G# E B E
1

MICK TAYLOR STYLE

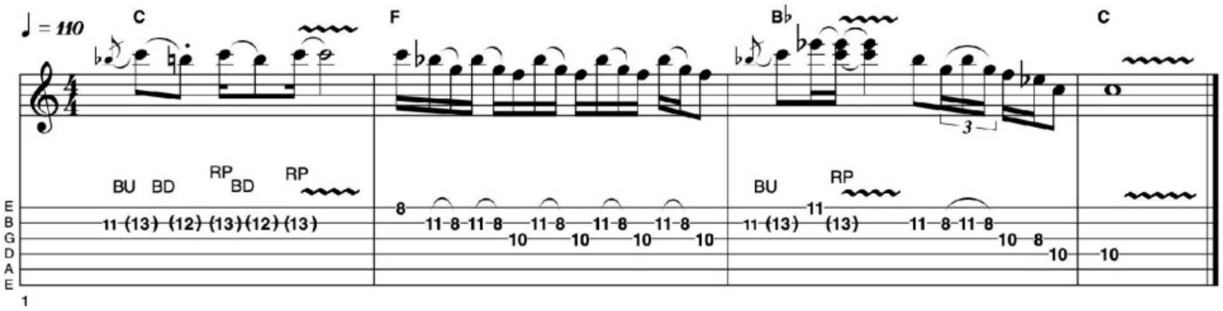
EXAMPLE **ONE**

This example shows how the 'country' 6th interval is often played by the band. MIck, Ronnie and Keith can all be heard using this approach at various times. Make sure your fretting-hand fingers make the appropriate 6th interval shape, with the picking hand either using a fingerstyle approach of thumb and finger, or a hybrid picking approach of pick and fingers, or just the pick using alternate picking. Of the three aproaches probably hybrid makes most sense.


♩ = 110
C
F
B♭
C
Let ring
Let ring
Let ring
Let ring
Let ring
Let ring
Let ring
BU BD
E B G D A E
1

EXAMPLE **TWO**

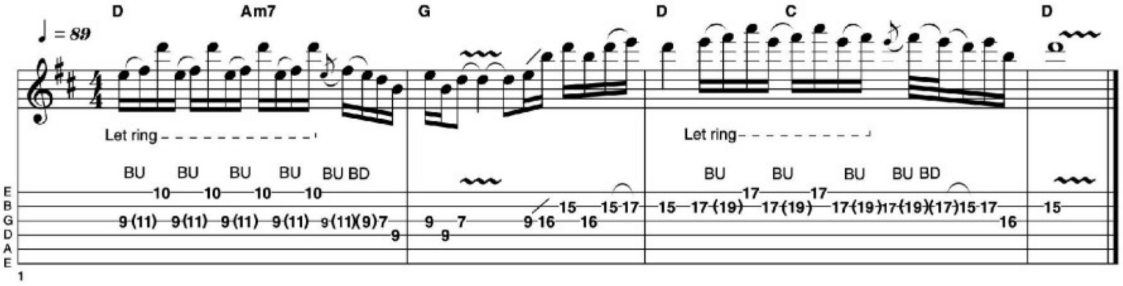
This example features some melodic bluesy licks, typical of Taylor's lyrical style. Bar 1 involves bending the string up a tone but only letting it down by a semitone, so accurate pitching is essential. Mick likely learned this idea from copying Eric Clapton, who favoured this often in his soloing. The repeating phrase over two strings in bar 2 is important to play cleanly. As a suggestion, try a downstroke on the second string and an upstroke on the third string.


♩ = 110
C
F
B♭
C
3
BU BD
RP BD
RP
BU
RP
E B G D A E
1

RONNIE WOOD STYLE

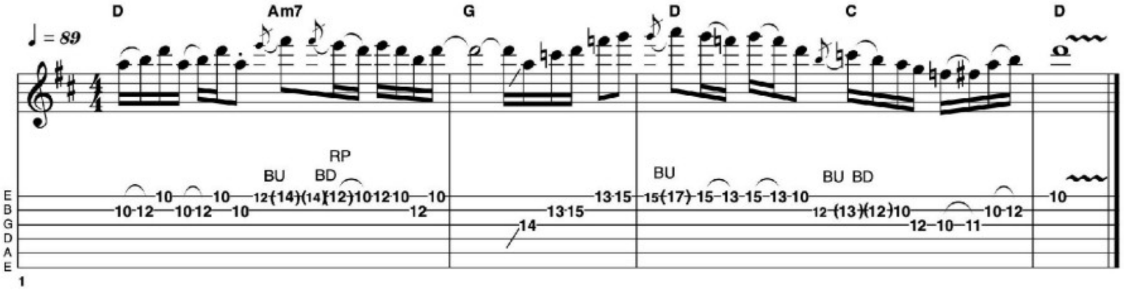
EXAMPLE **ONE**

This country-toned E Major Pentatonic (E-F#-G#-B-C#) idea features a 6th, with the third string bending up a tone (use the fretting hand's third finger), while the fourth finger frets the first string. In bar 3, use the same fingering for the bend on the second string, with the fourth finger fretting the first string.


♩ = 89
D
Am7
G
D
C
D
Let ring
Let ring
BU
BU
BU
BU
BU BD
BU
BU
BU
BU BD
E
B
G
D
A
E
1

EXAMPLE **TWO**

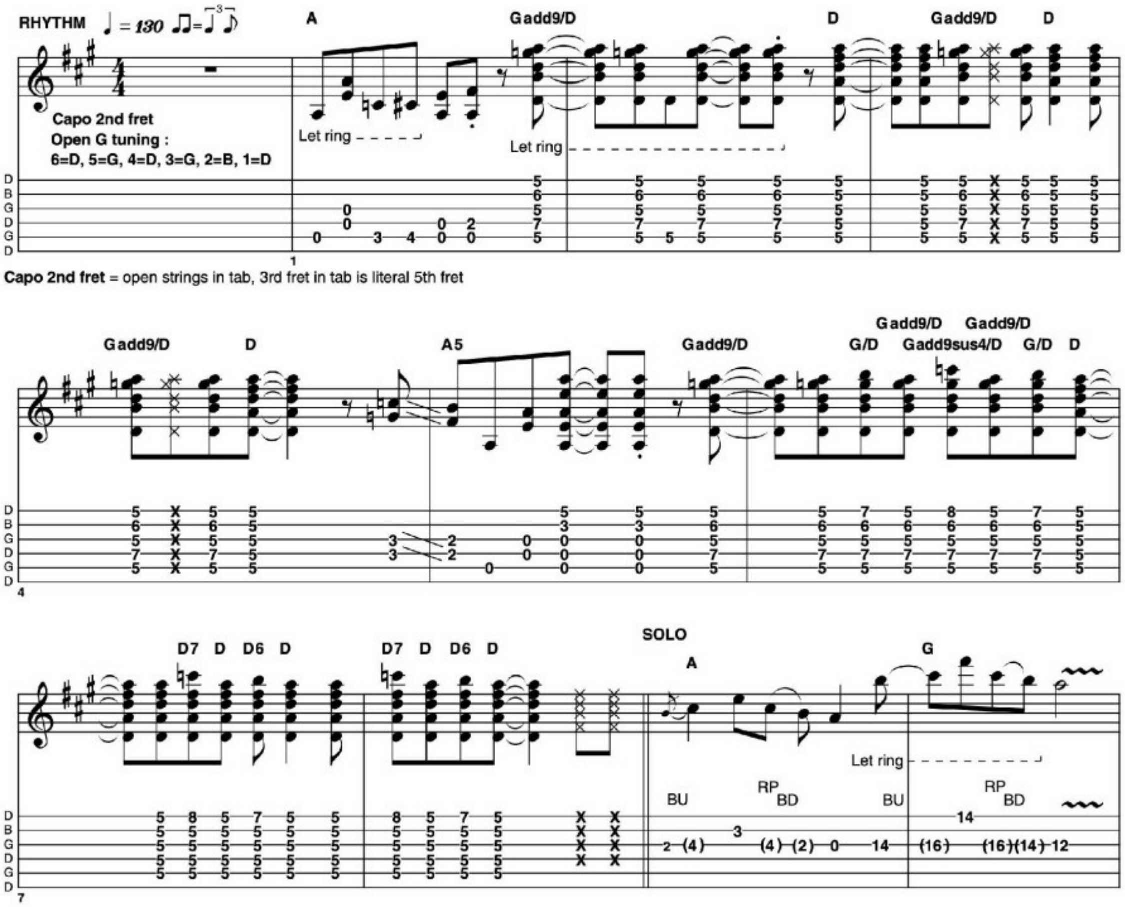
This example shows how the Major and Minor Pentatonic scales can inter-weave over a Major tonality chord progression in order to create a colourful mix of sweet Major sounds blending with bluesier Minor approaches. BB King was the master of this, with Clapton, Green and others highly influenced by it.


♩ = 89
D
Am7
G
D
C
D
BU
RP
BD
BU
BU BD
E
B
G
D
A
E
1

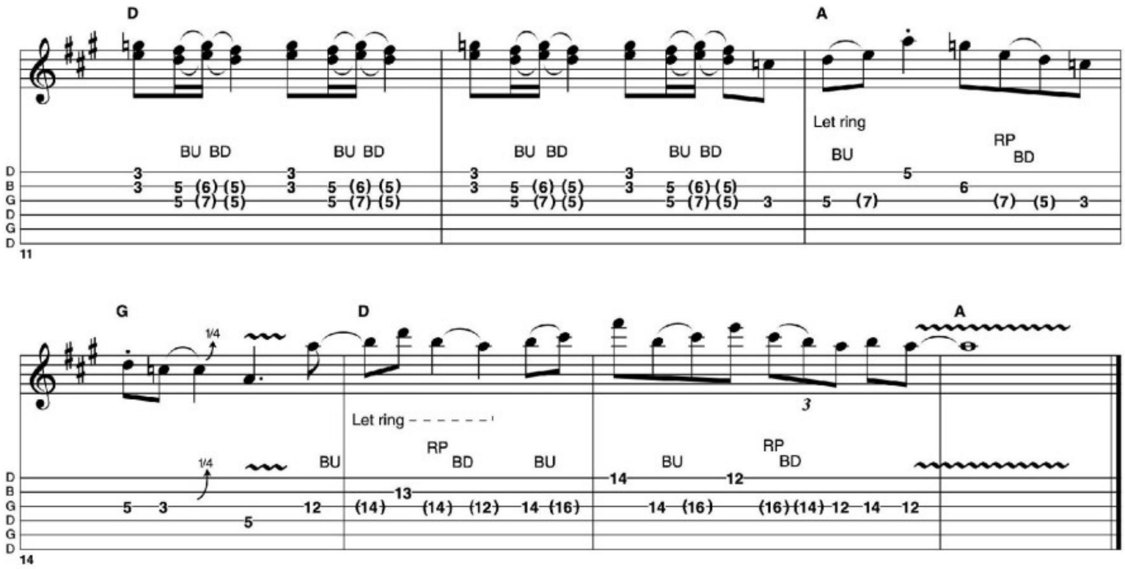
MINI PIECES

PIECE 1 **MAJOR**

This piece is in the key of A and is in open G tuning with the capo at the 2nd fret. The first eight bars are a rhythm part and feature our Keith Richards style approaches. The following eight bars are the solo. As the first string is lowered by a tone, remember the notes won't be in the same place as they normally are.

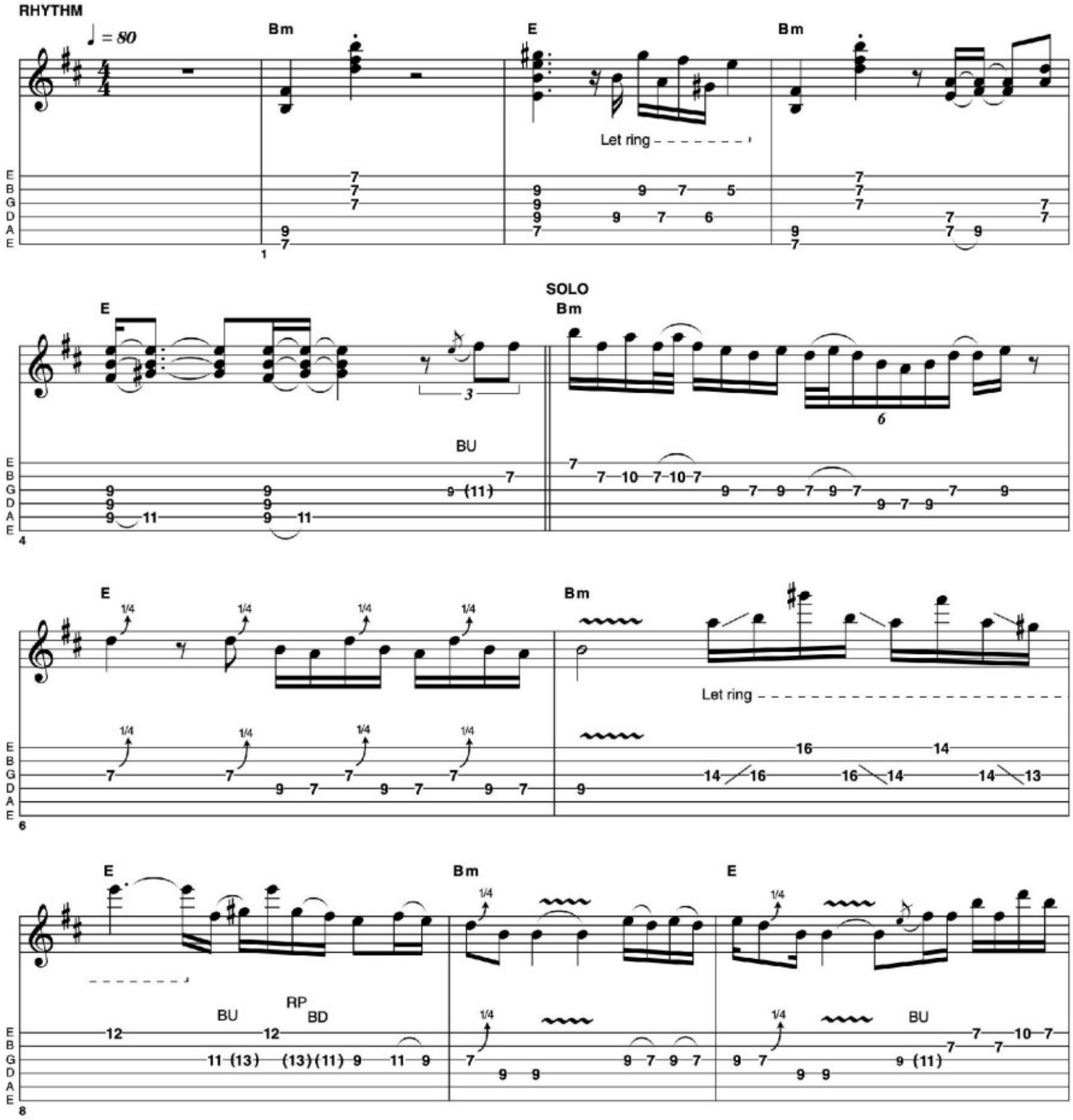

RHYTHM
♩ = 130
A
Gadd9/D
D
Gadd9/D
D
Capo 2nd fret
Open G tuning :
6=D, 5=G, 4=D, 3=G, 2=B, 1=D
Let ring
Let ring
Gadd9/D
D
A5
Gadd9/D
G/D
Gadd9/D
Gadd9sus4/D
Gadd9/D
G/D
D
D7
D
D6
D
D7
D
D6
D
SOLO
A
G
Let ring
BU
RP
BD
BU
RP
BD
D
B
G
D
G
D
1
4
7

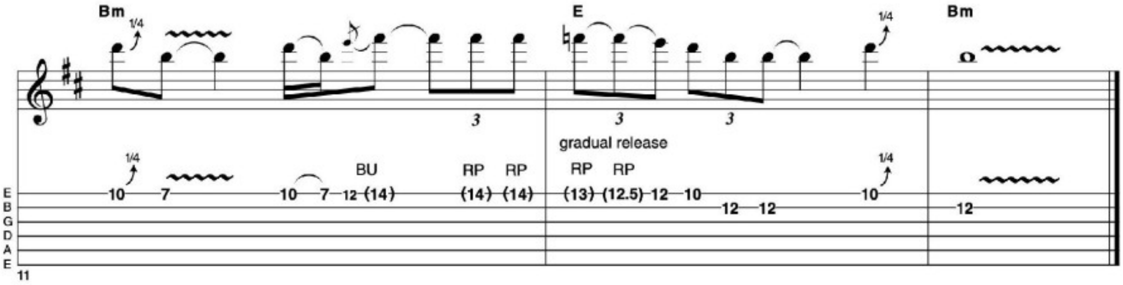
Capo 2nd fret = open strings in tab, 3rd fret in tab is literal 5th fret


D
A
G
D
A
Let ring
BU BD
RP BD
1/4
11
14

PIECE 2 **MINOR**

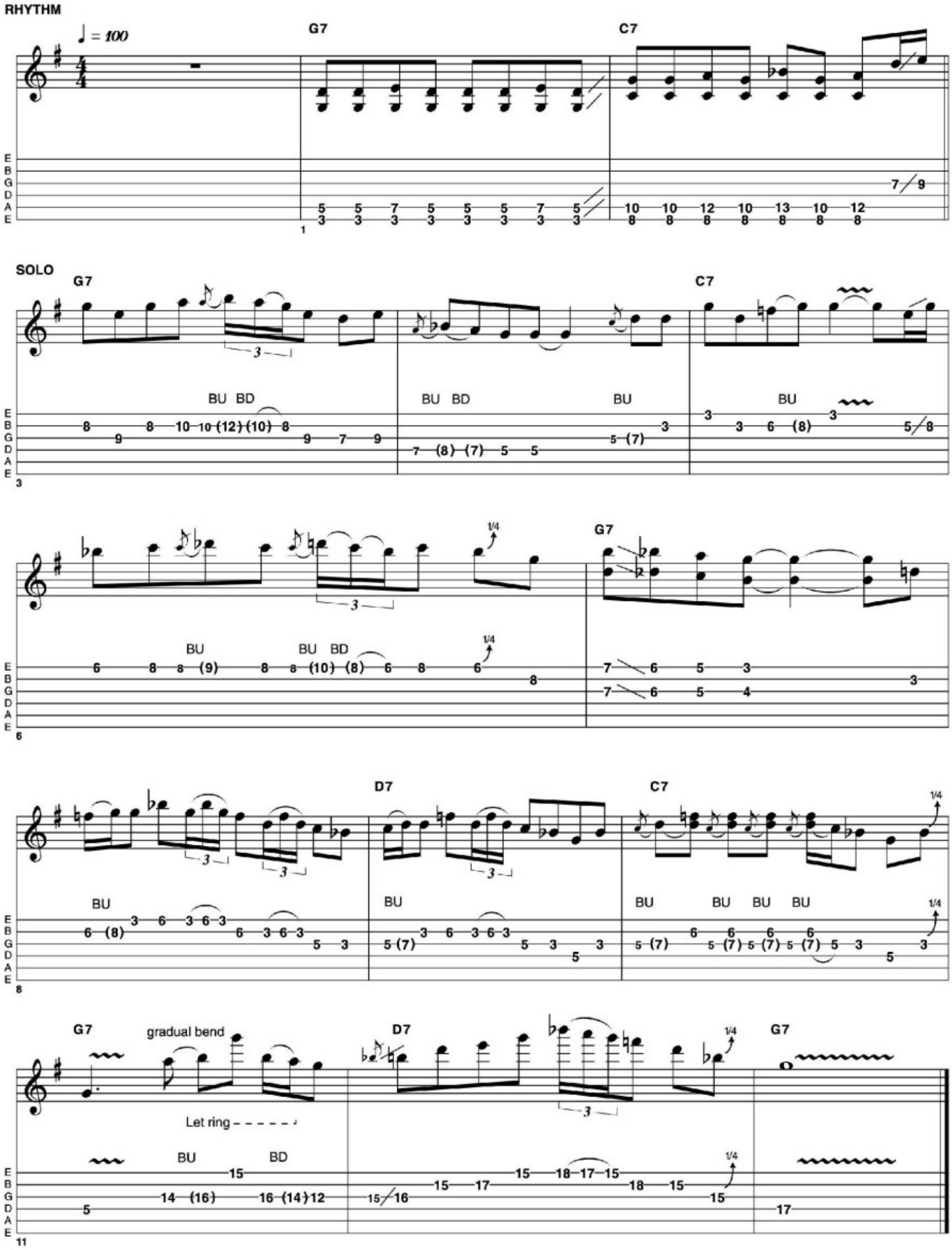
Our Minor piece has a tonal centre of B Minor and alternates between a bar of B Minor and a bar of E; the overall sound is B Dorian (B-C#-D-E-F#-G#-A). After the first four bars of 'rhythm', the subsequent solo section mainly contains B Minor Pentatonic (B-D-E-F#-A) bluesy licks. In bars 7 and 8 we encounter some E Major Pentatonic country flavoured licks over the E chord, adding another tonal character to the solo.


RHYTHM
♩ = 80
Bm
E
SOLO
Let ring
BU
RP BD
1/4
1
4
6
8


Bm
E
Bm
1/4
BU
RP
gradual release
11

PIECE 3 **BLUES**

This 12-bar blues in G has a straight, driving feel, with two bars of chunking blues shuffle rhythm before the solo kicks in. Featuring licks containing both G Major Pentatonic (G-A-B-D-E) and G Minor Pentatonic (G-B♭-C-D-F), the overall feel of the solo is melodic. Make sure your string bends are pitched accurately.


RHYTHM
♩ = 100
G7
C7
SOLO
D7
BU
BD
1/4
gradual bend
Let ring
3
6
8
11

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katohguitars.com.au

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THE KILLERS

Martin Cooper gets to grips with the enduring Las Vegas quartet that has gone on to conquer the world's arenas and pop charts.

Dave Keuning likes the classic guitars. Here he is with a Gibson Explorer

ROB LOUD/WIREIMAGE / GETTY IMAGES

ABILITY RATING

★★☆☆☆ Easy/Moderate

Info	Will improve your
Key: G Major	✔ Major scale phrasing
Tempo: 120 bpm	✔ Melodic playing
https://bit.ly/3SyHhN9	✔ Part writing & arranging

The Killers have become one of the most successful bands of the 21st century. They were formed in Las Vegas, Nevada in 2001 by lead vocalist Brandon Flowers and guitarist Dave Keuning, and after a few short-stay bass players and drummers settled on bassist Mark Stoermer and Ronnie Vannucci Jr on drums. While there have been replacements on tour for both Keuning and Stoermer, this line-up has featured on all The Killers albums and powers most of the group's tours.

The band's style incorporates an eclectic blend of influences, from Bruce Springsteen and U2, to New Order and Duran Duran. Koening's guitar parts are melodic in their orchestration and always serve the song effectively. There are also hints of early Radiohead in some of the single-note phrases that he employs.

The Killers found success with their very first single, and in fact Mr Brightside was the first song that Brandon Flowers and Dave Keuning wrote together. It first gained radio play in the UK, which led to radio stations in America and Australia picking up on it in 2003, and in turn gave them exposure to many of the major record labels of the time. After signing with Island Def Jam, they released their debut album *Hot Fuss*, and have been a mainstay in arenas and stadiums around the world ever since. Several of their studio albums have reached number 1 on the ARIA charts.

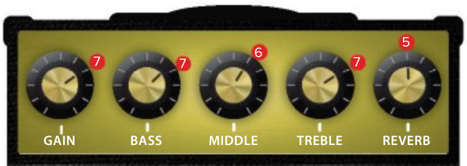
Our track this month is simple to play and is composed in a very direct way. It's the repetition of notes and lines that holds the key with this style of music. There are no Eddie Van Halen-style histrionics, or flurries of technical passages; it's all straightforward to play, and to listen to. One of the things that bands who sell out vast arenas often do is to simplify the writing and arranging so that the music isn't lost in large venues. Think of Coldplay, who are brilliant at connecting with huge audiences. With The Killers playing such stages from very early in their career, they found themselves almost writing stadium-ready tunes by proxy.

We're in the key of G (G-A-B-C-D-E-F#) and there are no bluesy phrases or targeted chord tones; it's very simple and positive G Major scale phrasing throughout.

That being said, for the most part each section begins on the IV chord, C Major (C-E-G) and is partly what makes this type of progression feel familiar without being stale.

The solo follows the harmony of the chords, and is what makes bands such as The Killers, U2 and Radiohead able to write simple melodic lines with wide appeal.

NEXT MONTH *Martin checks out another arena filling band, this time Dublin's very own* ***U2***



Get the Tone

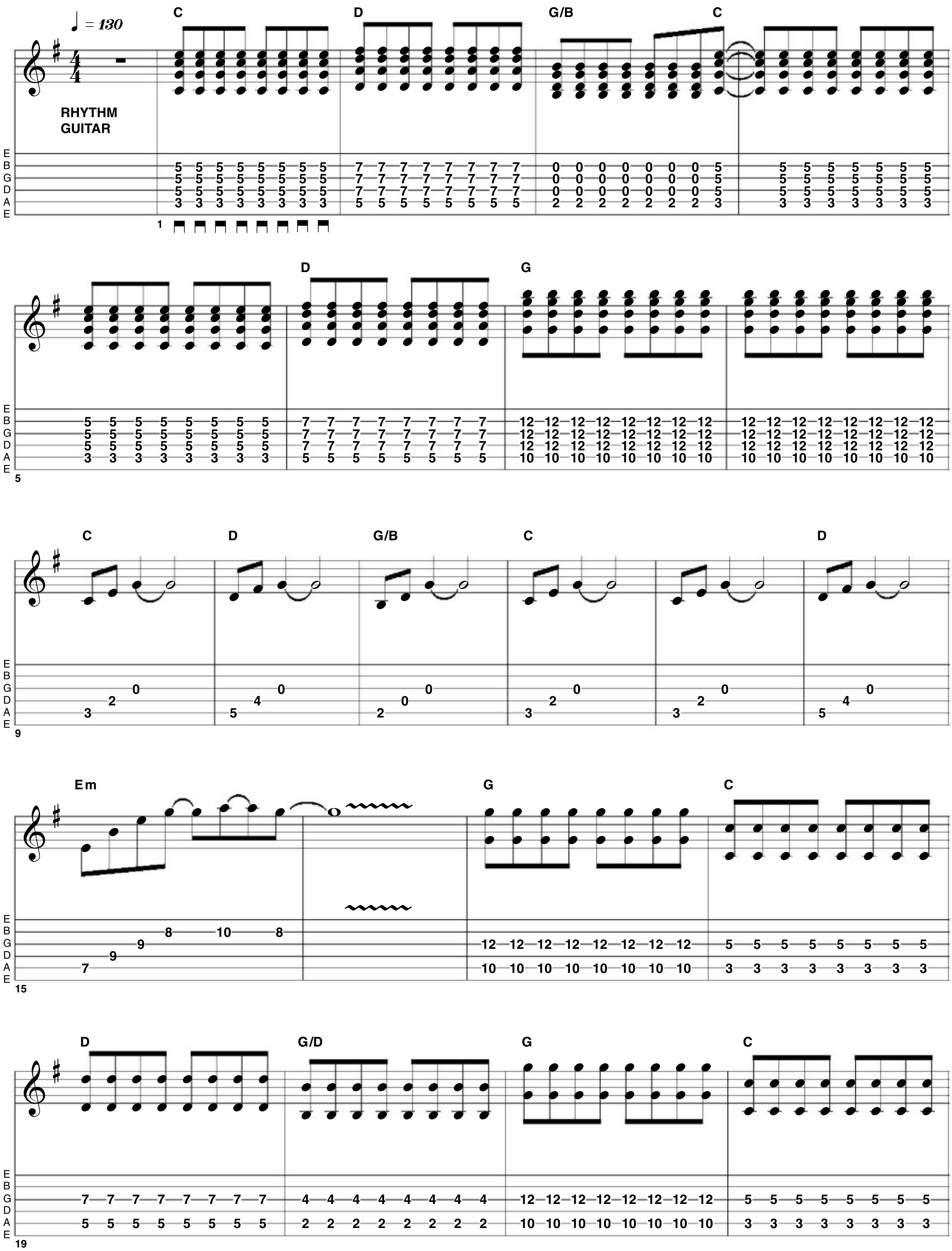
Dave Keuning uses guitars such as the Gibson Explorer or ES-355, and also the Fender Stratocaster. Amps are Fender style and there are often effects such as chorus and delay. Aim for a vintage style overdriven sound, but also with some modulation, such as chorus, added. This will help give the cinematic sound that bands like The Killers are popular for using.

TRACK RECORD Hot Fuss from 2004 features the single Mr Brightside, as well as Somebody Told Me and Smile Like You Mean It. Follow-up Sam's Town (2006) included When You Were Young and For Reasons Unknown. The Daniel Lanois, Steve Lillywhite and Brendan O'Brien-produced album Battle Born from 2012 featured the single Runaways, while live release Rebel Diamonds (2023) features all the hits.

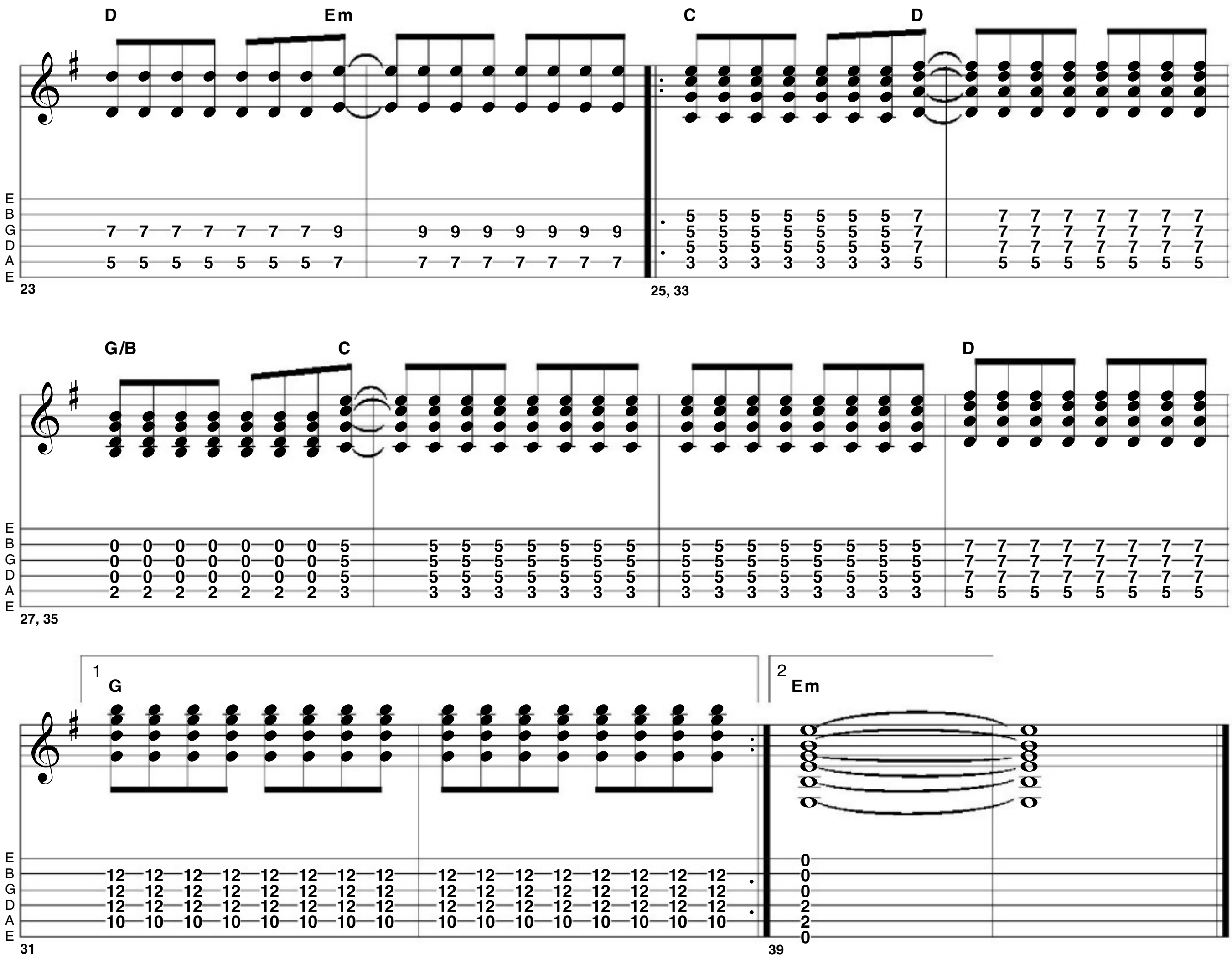
»

PLAYING NOTES RHYTHM

The rhythms are played as eighth notes throughout, and the phrasing is largely 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + for both the rhythm and lead guitar parts. Make sure your timing is accurate all the way, since this music is meant to be hypnotic. Be careful not to hit any unwanted strings on the octave parts in bars 17-24.

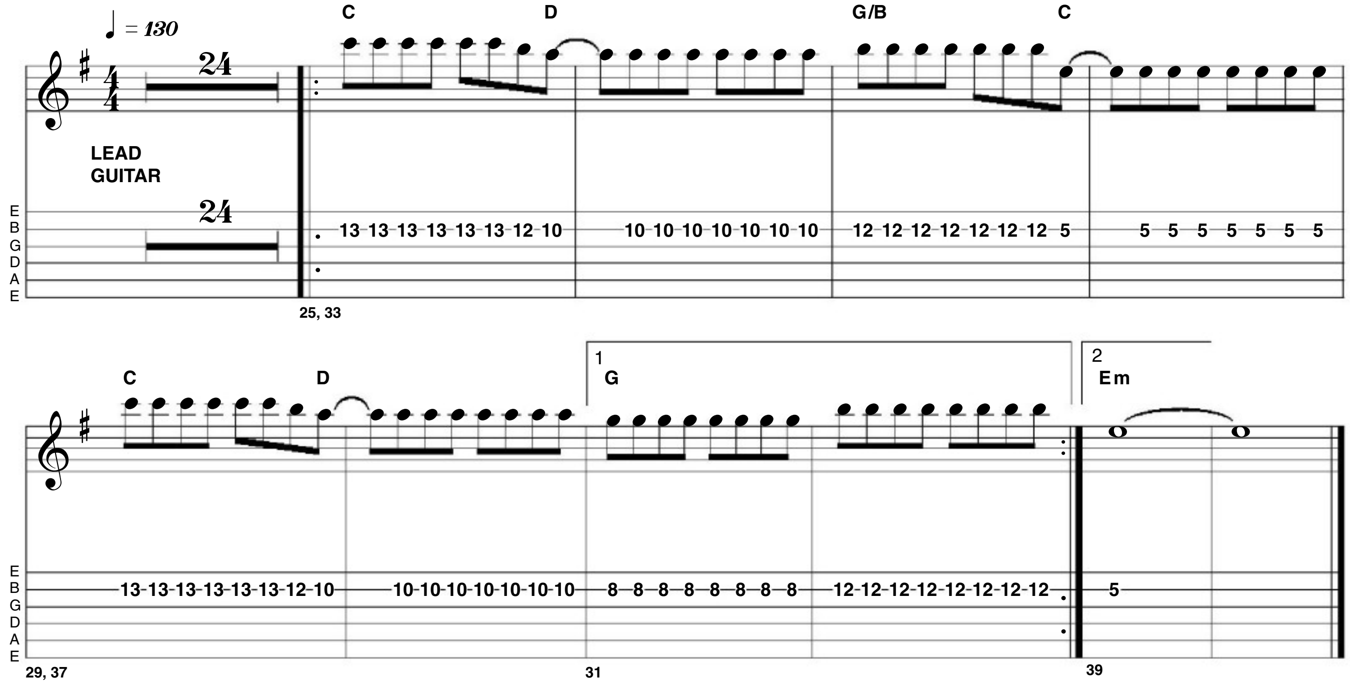

♩ = 130
RHYTHM GUITAR
C
D
G/B
C
D
G
C
D
G/B
C
D
Em
G
C
D
G/D
G
C
E B G D A E
1
5
9
15
19

PLAYING NOTES RHYTHM (CONTINUED)


D
Em
C
D
23
25, 33
G/B
C
D
27, 35
1
G
2
Em
31
39
E
B
G
D
A
E

PLAYING NOTES SOLO

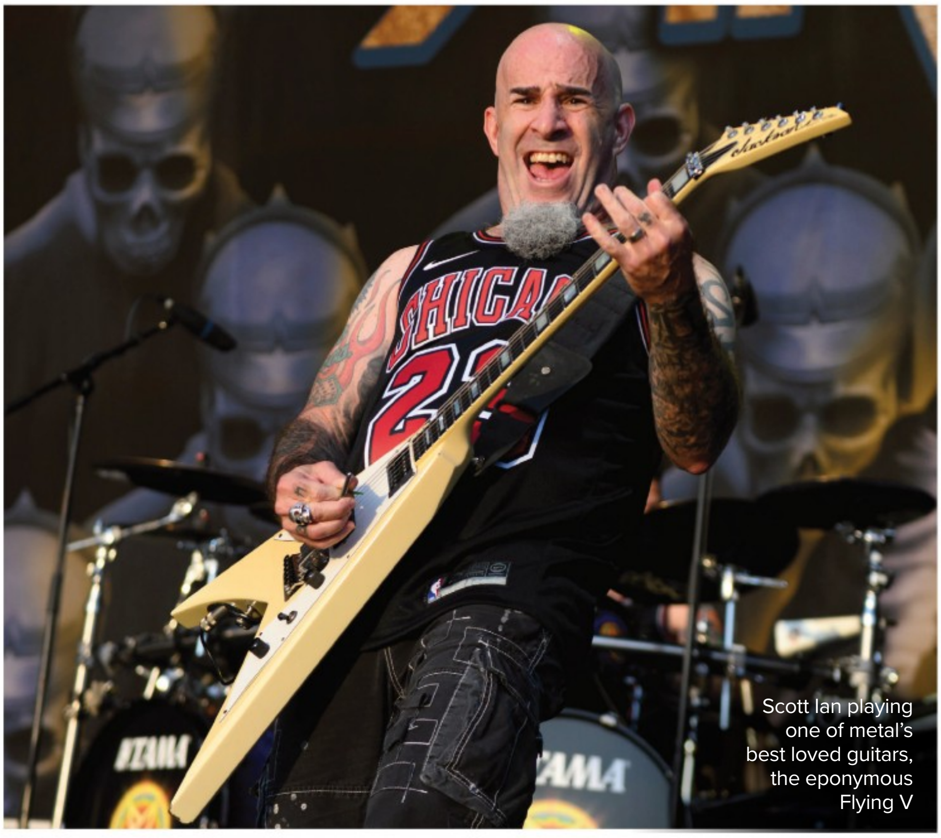
This isn't a solo in the accepted sense of the term, more a simple melodic statement that might recur during a song. It's not difficult to play, but again your timing is crucial due to the track's hypnotic rhythm. For maximum impact, consider using all down picks for these single notes.


♩ = 130
24
LEAD GUITAR
24
C
D
G/B
C
25, 33
C
D
1
G
2
Em
29, 37
31
39
E
B
G
D
A
E

VIDEO & AUDIO https://bit.ly/3SyHhN9

ANTHRAX

Jamie Hunt gets under the skin of this legendary metal band's guitarist, with two fantastic riffy rhythm ideas based on the style of Scott Ian.



Scott Ian playing one of metal's best loved guitars, the eponymous Flying V

DANIEL BOCZARSKI/REDFERNS / GETTY

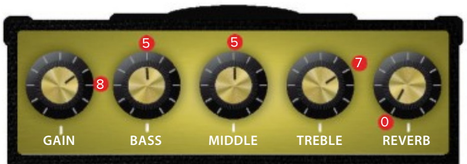
Since the release of the 1984 debut album, Fistful Of Metal, thrash metal has provided the backbone to Anthrax's unstoppable sound. In addition to fast down-picked sequences, alternate-picked riffs and serious palm muting, the band has no issues delivering a mid-tempo, heavy stomp. Or indeed blending grungy, alt-rock textures with sinister, menacing undertones. Anthrax has always been a two-guitarist band and, despite the lead guitar position moving through several players, Scott Ian has always been the driving force behind the group's powerful rhythm guitar work. With that in mind this lesson delves into Scott's unapologetic approach to thrash rhythmic precision, and the nuances that place Anthrax among The Big Four of thrash metal bands, alongside Metallica, Megadeth, and Slayer.

ABILITY RATING

★★★★☆ **Moderate / Advanced**

Info	**Will improve your**
Key: Various	✓ Picking-hand control
Tempo: Various	✓ Palm muting
https://bit.ly/3SyHhN9	✓ Legato lines

> *"This lesson delves into Scott Ian's unapologetic approach to thrash rhythm guitar."*

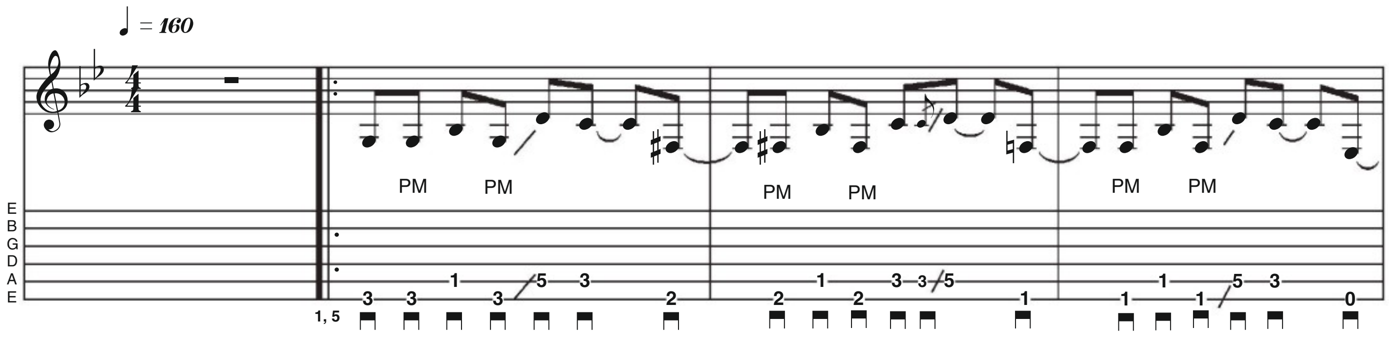


Get the Tone

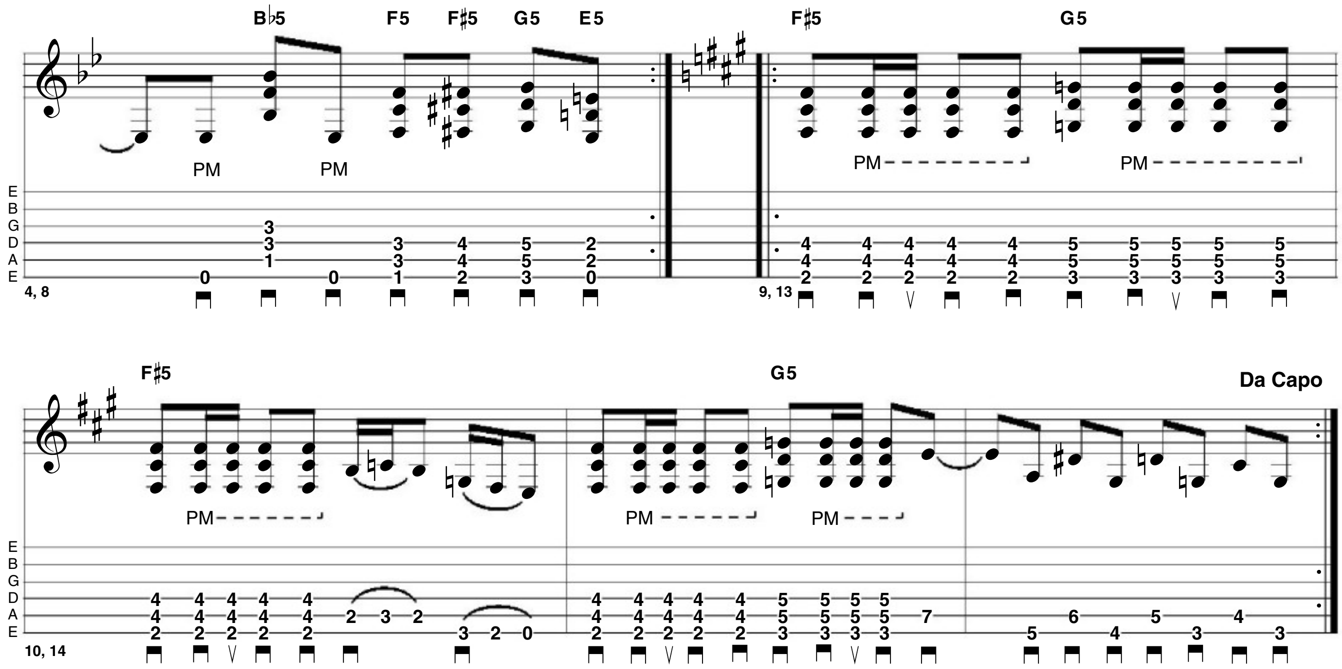
For a good thrash tone, use your bridge pickup and select the distortion channel on your amp. To add punch, and to articulate your sound, set your gain moderately high, leave your bass and middle at the 12 o'clock position, and boost the treble. This will add bite, retain pitch definition, and keep your lower frequencies sounding tight. As will adding no reverb.

STYLE STUDY 1

The opening section features a repeated melodic motif with a chromatically descending bass note. This brings tension, and contrasts with the chromatically ascending powerchord sequence that closes the phrase. The second section includes 16th-note subdivisions. Use upstrokes to maintain fluidity on the faster rhythms and return to downstrokes for the chromatically descending 5ths in the final bar.

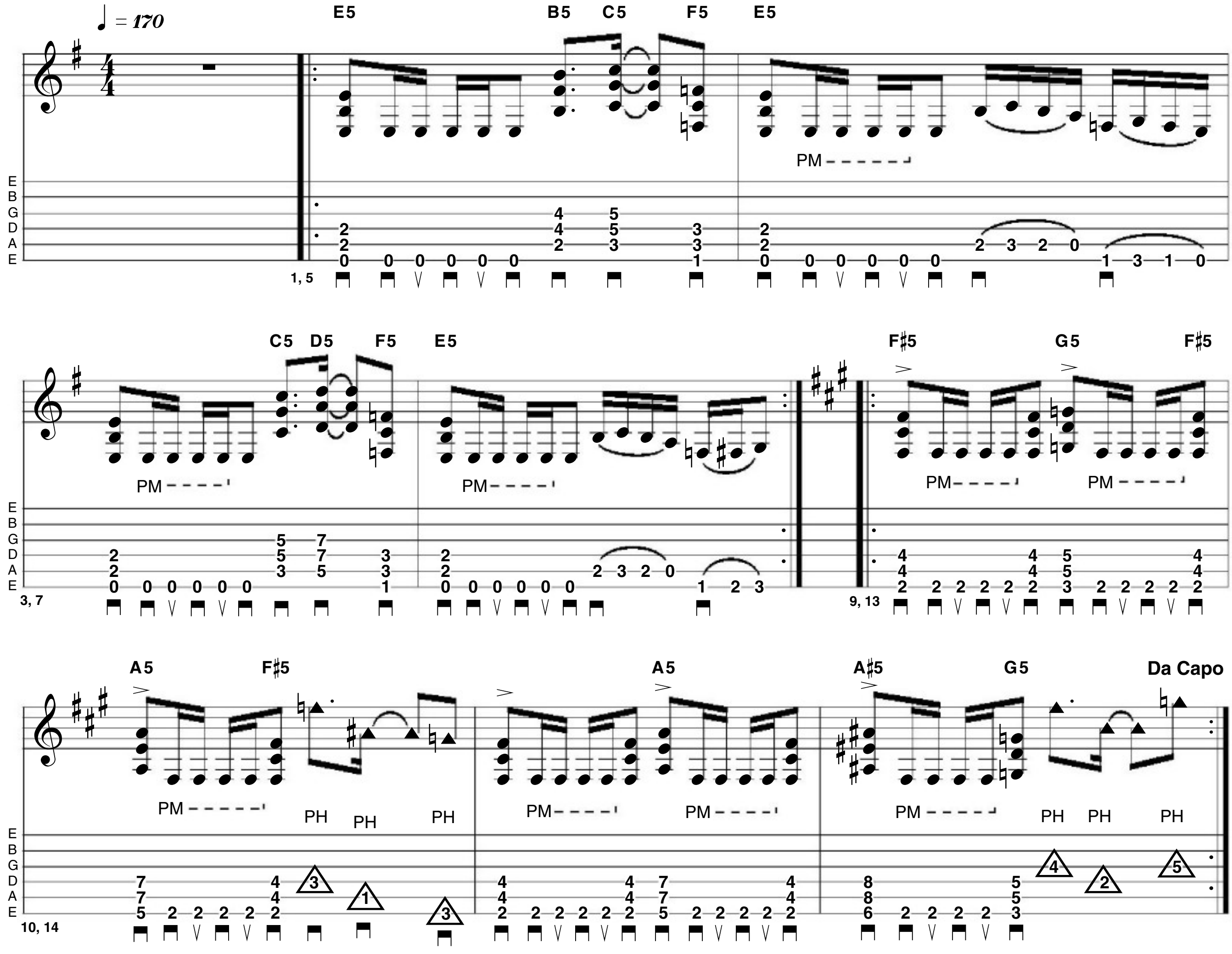


STYLE STUDY 1 *CONTINUED…*


B♭5
F5
F♯5
G5
E5
F♯5
G5
PM
PM
PM
PM
4, 8
9, 13
F♯5
G5
Da Capo
PM
PM
PM
10, 14
E
B
G
D
A
E

STYLE STUDY 2

The first phrase uses fast, 16th-note rhythms. Follow the suggested pick directions to keep the phrases flowing smoothly. Use a downstroke and legato for the fills in the second and fourth bar, as this will reduce fatigue in the picking hand. The second phrase introduces single-note figures played as abrasive pinch harmonics. To achieve them, use downstrokes and brush the string with the side of your thumb immediately after you strike the note.


♩ = 170
E5
B5
C5
F5
E5
PM
1, 5
C5
D5
F5
E5
F♯5
G5
F♯5
PM
PM
PM
PM
3, 7
9, 13
A5
F♯5
A5
A♯5
G5
Da Capo
PM
PH
PH
PH
PM
PM
PM
PH
PH
PH
10, 14
E
B
G
D
A
E

HOT GEAR

9V
GO
YES!
THAT'S IT
OOSH
GARY
EXP
EarthQuakerDevices

Fender
TELECASTER

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES GARY

RRP: $399.99 • au.yamaha.com

Conceived by Idles guitarist Lee Kiernan, Gary started as a simple request to create a compact version of the now discontinued Gray Channel, which was a mainstay on Lee's board and a big part of his main drive tone. This was all fine and good, and sounded quite sick, but Gary was demanding that ED look deeper and explore his dark side a little more, Gary after dark, Saturday night Gary. So, they sat him down and began the trek of figuring out old Gare-Bear once and for all. The result is a dynamic and destructive pulse width modulated fuzz paired with a natural-sounding op-amp overdrive.

PHIL JONES BASS DOUBLE FOUR PLUS BG-80

RRP: $1,199 • egm.net.au

With increased power and newly added features, the Double Four Plus BG-80 is a worthy successor to PJB's legendary BG-75 Double Four model. The BG-80 is a 90Watt single channel bass combo with two four-inch speakers and a 3 band EQ that is perfectly tailored for bass guitar. Other features include an auxiliary input for iPad/iPod, smart phone or drum machine, stereo headphone–out jack and a line out for recording.

FENDER MADE IN JAPAN LIMITED EDITION SPARKLE TELECASTER

RRP: $1,899 • fender.com

With an eye-catching sparkle on the body top and Black Top Filter'Tron pickups, the Black Top Filter'Tron pickup produces a balanced and clear tone with a sense of scale. The loud and punchy sound maintains a clear tone without losing its contours at any gain level. Equipped with Vintage-Style Locking tuners that provide accurate and stable tuning, a satin-finished neck finish, 22 narrow-tall frets, and a 9.5-inch radius Modern "C" shape maple neck provide higher playability. Available in Black, Silver, Blue and Orange.

ZOOM
LiveTrak L6

ZOOM LIVETRAK L6

RRP: $499 • dynamicmusic.com.au

The LiveTrak L6 is Zoom's most compact and portable digital mixer / recorder. With 10-tracks of studio quality audio, effects, MIDI, and sound pads, it's perfect for bands, synth players, live streaming, and more. Despite its diminutive dimensions, the L6 is designed with big mixer capabilities; a full channel strip for each track including aux sends, pan, effects, and a 3-band mid-sweepable EQ. It records 10 discrete tracks plus the full stereo mix on microSD cards up to 2TB. Share the live mix, or transfer your stems to your favorite DAW for editing and mixing. With 32-bit float and pristine sounding preamps, you will get beautiful clip-free audio every time, without the need to set gain.

ZOOM
FRONT
REAR

ZOOM H2 ESSENTIAL

RRP: $299 • dynamicmusic.com.au

The H2essential is the only Handy Recorder with three internal microphones. With the ability to select different mic patterns, it gives creators more options than ever before. With two cardioid mics facing front and rear and a bi-directional mic facing side to side, the H2essential allows you to choose the perfect pick-up pattern for every recording. Set your pickup pattern to 90º or 120º stereo, or choose mono for a hyper directional pickup, reducing background noise. Then choose to record from the front, rear, or activate both sides for surround sound pickup.

PHIL JONES BASS' BASS ENGINE BE-17

RRP: $TBA • egm.net.au

The one super high-efficiency and proprietary 7-inch speaker was designed by Phil Jones to get the most of the 70 watts (RMS) class D amplifier with liner Analog Pre-amp. This amazing woofer is complimented by PJB's high energy 3-inch, high-frequency transducer. This speaker has been used in tens of thousands of PJB's PA speakers and has proven to be extremely reliable. The response is of the highest fidelity from 31Hz to 22KHz, which means it not only sounds great with bass but also with many other instruments, making it a very versatile amplifier.

PHIL JONES BASS DOUBLE FOUR PLUS BG-80

RRP: $1,199 • egm.net.au

With increased power and newly added features, the Double Four Plus BG-80 is a worthy successor to PJB's legendary BG-75 Double Four model. The BG-80 is a 90Watt single channel bass combo with two four-inch speakers and a 3 band EQ that is perfectly tailored for bass guitar. Other features include an auxiliary input for iPad/iPod, smart phone or drum machine, stereo headphone–out jack and a line out for recording.

BASSMAN DRIVER
BASSMAN COMP
BASSMAN DELAY
BASSMAN FUZZ
BASSMAN REVERB

FENDER BASSMAN PEDALS

RRP: $179 - $219 • fender.com

Bassman pedals have all your basses covered. Drawing inspiration from the original tube amp line that laid way for Fender's sub-sonic signal processing, the Bassman pedal line hosts a collection of meticulously crafted analog and digital circuits all curated from the ground up for bass-centric tonal expansion. With three controls, two slide switches, a footswitch and top-mounted connections, the pedals are extremely user-friendly and take up little space on the pedalboard. Bassman pedals include the Bassman Driver, Bassman Reverb, Bassman Compressor, Bassman Fuzz and Bassman Delay.

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INVOICE #
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DOLBY:
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REMIX B
30 I.P.S.
15 I.P.S.
7½ I.P.S.
NAB
IEC
CCIR
8 TR
4 TR
2 TR
MONO
TITLE
COMMENTS
EDITS

SPECIAL FEATURE

ELECTRIC LADY STUDIOS

LONG-STANDING HENDRIX ENGINEER EDDIE KRAMER AND FILMMAKER JOHN MCDERMOTT TELL US ABOUT JIMI'S FINAL BRAINWAVE

ROAD-TESTED

KRK ROKIT 5 G5

KRK'S EXCELLENT ROKIT MONITORS HAVE BEEN UPDATED. WE GET TALKING ABOUT THE NEW GENERATION

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POWER STATION

Founded by Jimi Hendrix mere months before his death, **Electric Lady Studios** was a mind-expanding creative mothership where his guitar playing reached new heights. As a new documentary explores this lost chapter, long-standing Hendrix engineer Eddie Kramer and filmmaker John McDermott tell us about Jimi's final brainwave

Words Henry Yates

Take a walk down New York's 8th Street in modern times and you'll find barely a sniff of the 60s counterculture that once pulsed in this neighbourhood. There is just one last holdout against the gentrification of Greenwich Village. Blink and you'll miss the mirrored gunmetal door. Yet beyond it lies the city's most fabled recording studio, conceived by Jimi Hendrix in the late 60s, operational by summer 1970, and the scene of the guitarist's final creative burst before his death that September.

By now, everybody knows about Hendrix's 1966 touchdown in London and the shifting of rock's tectonic plates, about this Seattle-born sonic terrorist's onstage humbling of Clapton, and the breakout Bag O' Nails show that forced Britain's guitar class to give up or get serious. By contrast, one chapter that has never been trawled to death is the birth of Electric Lady Studios. And that's a curious oversight because the story of this recording facility has everything, from quixotic ambition and ruinous debt, to last-gasp redemption and some of Jimi's most beautiful music.

Now, at last, the guitarist's spiritual home is getting its due with director John McDermott's fantastic new documentary, *Electric Lady Studios: A Jimi Hendrix Vision*. "It's the history of how we put the damn place together, which was kind of a miracle when you think about it," says Hendrix's famed engineer Eddie Kramer, as he joins our Zoom call. "It was basically a bunch of hippies who thought they knew what they were doing. And I guess we did..."

The story goes that Electric Lady was originally going to be a nightclub?

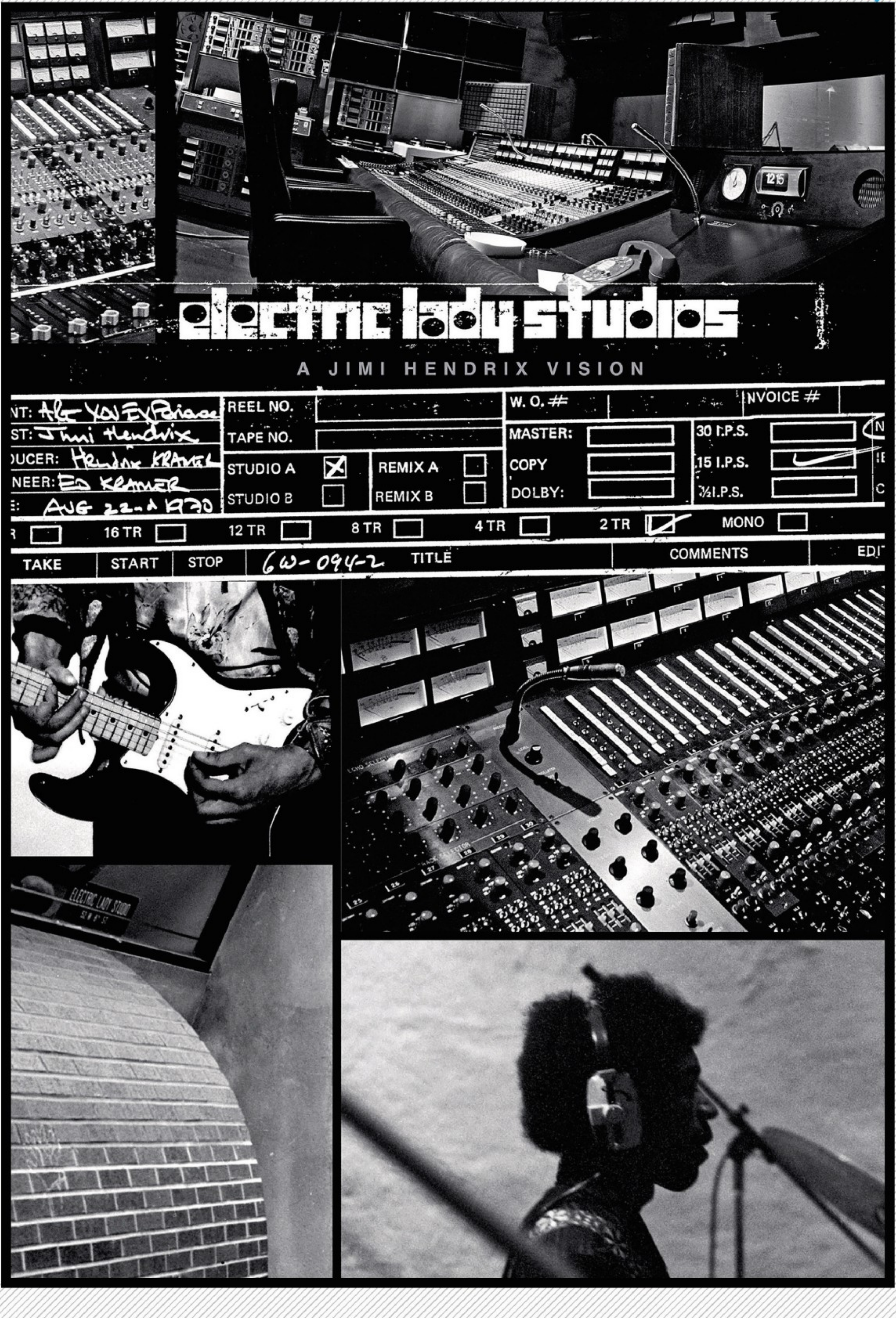
Eddie Kramer: "Well, that was Jimi's thing. He loved to jam. He loved to go down to the Generation Club, as a place to hang – and he would always jump on the stage, no matter what was going on. So one day I get the call saying, 'We're gonna build a nightclub in the Village.' And I'm looking at the site, thinking, 'This is a great space. But what about what Jimi's been doing for the past year, spending money day after day at the Record Plant, The Hit Factory, wherever?' I mean, thank goodness he did that because it meant we had a huge body of material to work with. But, you know, he was spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on studio time. So I came up with a proposal: 'Let's make this the best studio in the world for Jimi. It's gonna be his home, he'll love it, it'll be a place he can relax and create.' And they went, 'Yeah, good idea. Okay, let's do that.'"

John McDermott: "I think it was an easy switch for Jimi. Once Eddie made the point to him that this could be his creative home, I think that's when he really seized on that concept. As a commercial enterprise, the nightclub business was much more rough and tumble in those days. If you think about Cerebrum or the Generation Club or The Scene – none of which worked – I think building a studio was really the wisest move. The idea that somebody like Jimi could come in and successfully manage a club – it just wouldn't have lasted. Unlike the studio, which is still here today."

How much of a wreck was the original site?

John: "The Hendrix family was able to purchase the photography that documents the construction of the studio. And it truly was a mess. Y'know, they've got this problem, that problem, they hit water underneath the studio. It spiralled to the point where, as you'll see in the film, he had to go to Warner Brothers to get a $300,000 loan to finish the studio. Which in itself was a ballsy move. That was an enormous amount of money back then. It came at a difficult time for Jimi. He was in litigation with Ed Chalpin over the old Curtis Knight recordings. He had [financial] obligations that seemed unrelenting. So it was difficult to be able to have the cash to simply move forward and get it done."

IMAGE OPPOSITE: 'ELECTRIC LADY STUDIOS: A JIMI HENDRIX VISION' COVER ARTWORK


electric lady studios
A JIMI HENDRIX VISION
ELECTRIC LADY STUDIO

NT: Are You Experience
ST: Jimi Hendrix
UCER: Hendrix Kramer
NEER: Ed Kramer
E: Aug 22nd 1970

REEL NO.
TAPE NO.
STUDIO A ☒
STUDIO B ☐
REMIX A ☐
REMIX B ☐

W. O. #
NVOICE #
MASTER: ☐
COPY ☐
DOLBY: ☐
30 I.P.S. ☐
15 I.P.S. ☑
7½ I.P.S. ☐

R ☐ 16 TR ☐ 12 TR ☐ 8 TR ☐ 4 TR ☐ 2 TR ☑ MONO ☐

TAKE | START | STOP | 6W-094-2 | TITLE | COMMENTS | EDI

1

How did it feel to finally see that derelict shell become a psychedelic spaceship?
Eddie: "Well, I love your description of the spaceship. It looks like something out of *Star Wars*. Another cool thing was the colours. There were these bloody great big coloured spotlights, in various shapes and sizes. And then, in the control room, you had pro theatre lighting – none of that electronic digital shit, this was the real deal. I almost felt like you could play those lights like I could play the console. Jimi would say, 'Hey man, I want green over here, purple over there,' and we'd just dial in this beautiful vibe, which helped to create the atmosphere of the music. He'd be like, 'Give me red, man.' And that would mean distortion."
John: "There was no studio construction industry back then. They were winging it. It wasn't as if they were hiring a major company who had built 12 studios before. They were hiring technicians, craftsmen, who could bring [architect] John Storyk's drawings to life. The round windows, the carpeting on the wall, the coloured lighting – Jimi was looking for a comfortable environment to be creative. And for someone like Hendrix – who had known poverty, right there in the rear-view mirror – it had to be exhilarating to think, 'I'm on the cusp of having this unimaginable place and I can come down here any time I feel like it.' At that point, you start to have all kinds of collaborative and creative opportunities. It's like, 'Hey, Steve Winwood's in town, let's ask him to come on over and do something.' Because now they have the place to do it and no-one is gonna tell them to stop because there's another group waiting out in the lobby."

> **"There was no studio construction industry then. They were winging it"**
>
> *John McDermott*

Do you remember Jimi's reaction when he saw the finished studio?
Eddie: "Oh, he loved it. He came in early every bloody night. It was amazing to see him at the door. Like, 'Jimi's ready at seven o'clock, holy crap!'"

Hendrix recorded all over the map, but do you think there was a certain flavour that crept into his guitar playing once he got to Electric Lady?
Eddie: "I don't know if I would use the term 'crept in' – it manifested itself immediately. The energy level was so high. Man, he was on fire. The music took on this high-energy, high-voltage feel – and Jimi is ramping up those performances, and laughing and giggling. When you hear the outtakes, it's wonderful, the rapport between him, myself, the band, even the roadies. It was a joy to be there. The three of them [Hendrix, drummer Mitch Mitchell and bassist Billy Cox] were just fantastic together. Their brains were on fire. You could tell. There was this fabulous energy, that sparkle in the studio."

Why was Electric Lady such a good recording space for guitar?
Eddie: "Well, we lucked out. I mean, John Storyk had never designed a studio in his life before. But we had a very good acoustician who helped us. If you look at the shape of the room, the ceiling sloped up to the highest point, which was right by the control room. The way the plaster was laid up into that ceiling, one half of the room sounded live and the other half sounded kind of dead and down. It just became this magic formula. Drums and bass sounded great. Guitar sounded amazing – because if Jimi was overdubbing a solo, we would just open up all the screens in the studio. I could stick a mic at the back end of the room, and you'd hear the guitar at the front, but then you'd also hear this beautiful decay. When that was mixed in, the guitar sounded frickin' enormous."

Another departure from the norm was that Electric Lady had a huge control room.
Eddie: "Yeah. Today, of course, everybody sits in the control room to overdub guitar, but nobody was doing that in those days. Jimi would say, 'Hey man, can I play my guitar in the control room?' He'd get this long cord, jack a few things, find

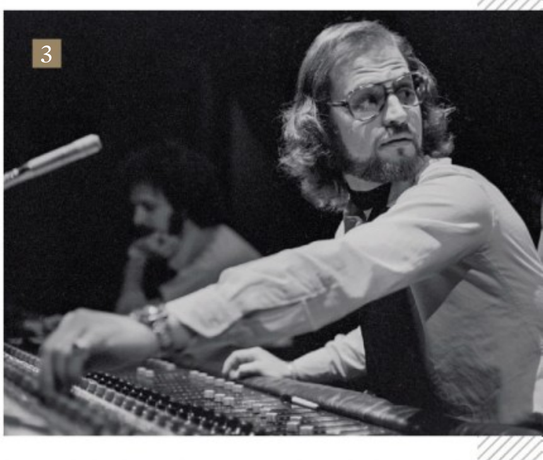
1. The studio's interior was a psychedelic experience

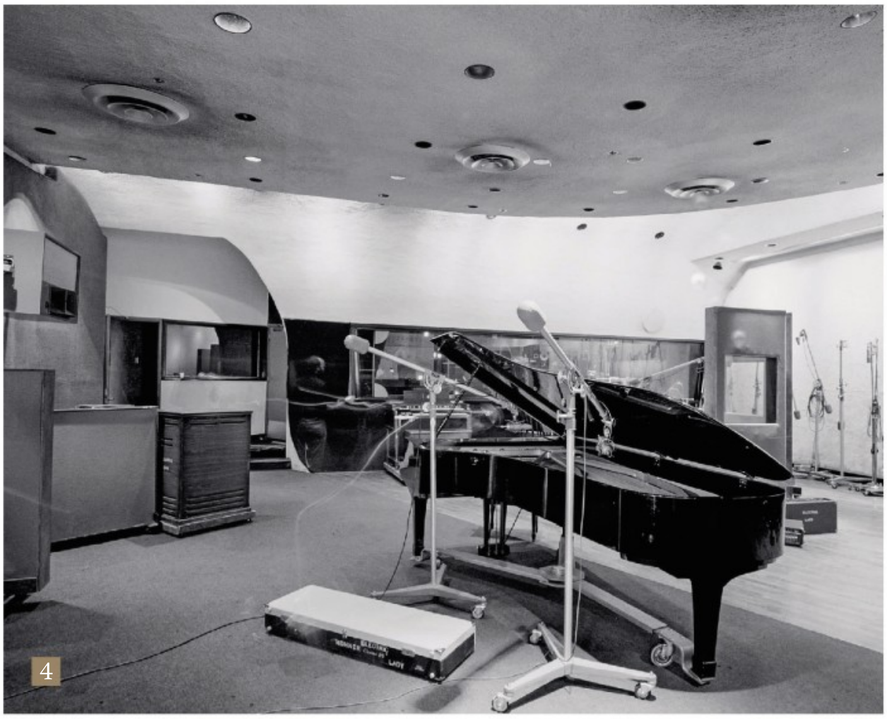
2. Shimon Ron, chief technical engineer at Electric Lady Studios

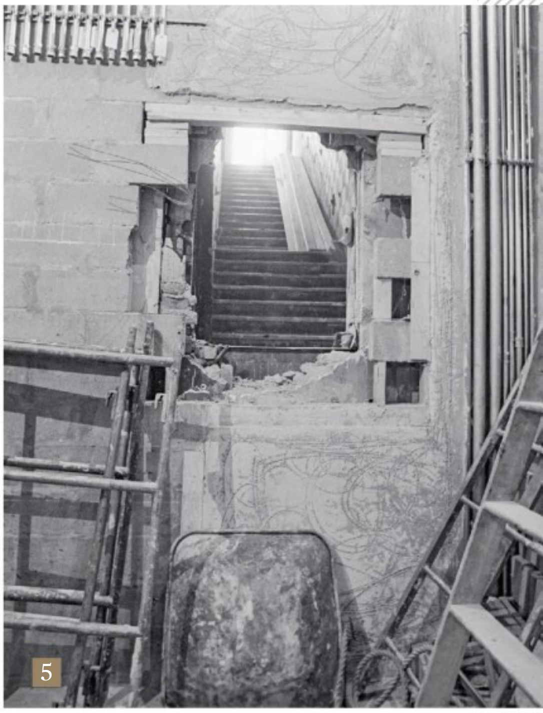
3. Eddie Kramer at the desk in the studio's early days

4. Jimi would experience the state-of-the-art space for just 10 weeks before his death in September '70

5. The site would hit many hurdles, including flooding, on its journey to becoming Jimi's 'home'







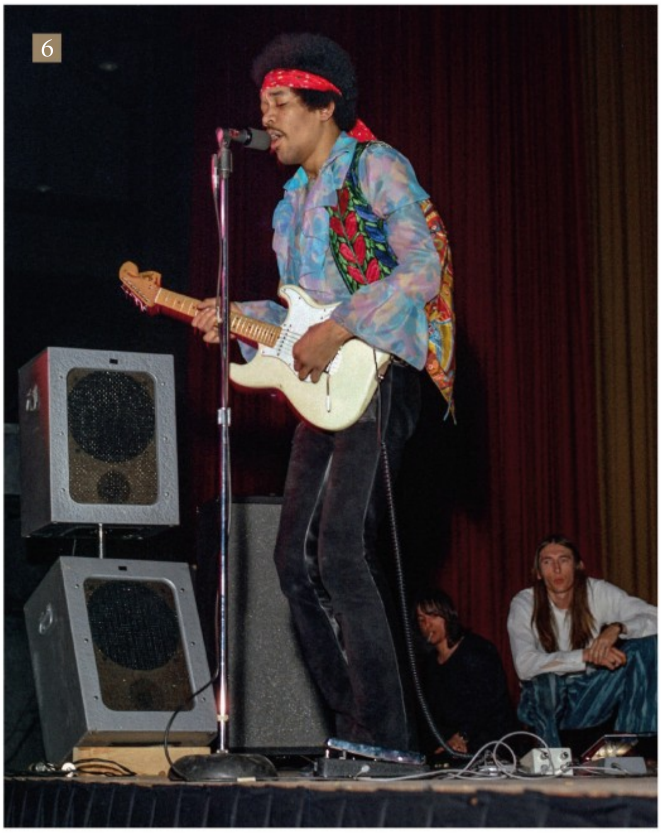
a place to plug it in. And then he's sitting there listening, like, 'Ah, so that's what it sounds like on the big speakers.' And we'd say, 'This is Jimi's jack, nobody messes with that.'

"We were one of the first studios to have 24-track, and I did the same thing with the console, making sure that we were able to cut 24 tracks. So we felt we needed a bigger control room with more depth than standard. When you were sat at the desk, you'd be looking at four huge monitors. There'd be two horizontal Altecs and two vertical ones, and the idea was to be able to have four-track monitoring. Plus, if you look at where the console ended, there was this drop-down and this beautiful bench below, all done in velvet for Jimi's guests. So they were out of sight, thank God. It was like, 'Shush down there!' You could have 10 people in there and it wouldn't bother you. But at Electric Lady, there were only ever a few hangers-on."

Where did Jimi keep his guitars and amps at Electric Lady?
Eddie: "The guitars were mostly kept at his apartment because he lived just around the corner on 12th Street. With recording, sometimes, he might use a Gibson – just for the tone difference – but 98 per cent of the time at Electric Lady it was the Strat. And Marshall was front and centre. Obviously, on the *Electric Ladyland* album, there were a couple of tracks where it was a huge Fender amp with, like, eight speakers, and that's what gave it that crazy bottom-end. But in that late period, Marshall was his go-to. That and the pedals. I think Roger Mayer had done some more tweaking. But there were so many other companies coming to him by then. Gibson gave him some crazy-ass pedals in those days."
John: "You gotta think about this: when they started at Electric Lady, yes, it was operational, but the freight elevator didn't work yet. So they had to hump that stuff by hand down those long stairs. So they had some stuff like amps in lockers, so Jimi didn't necessarily have to take his Marshalls out and bring them back in."

Jimi only got about 10 weeks at Electric Lady. But as the new boxset reminds us, he nailed some great tracks in that period.
Eddie: "Well, you look at the tape boxes and how far back a track like *Dolly Dagger* goes, how many overdubs were done – it was a work in progress and Jimi wasn't satisfied until it was the way he heard it in his head. It's a complex track, a lot going on. There were so many intense overdubs that we would have to punch in. I would even have to cut the tape to make sure we didn't get any overrun, then splice it back together. *Freedom* – same thing. Same intensity. Same attention to detail."
John: "The interesting thing about Electric Lady is that you were able to build the complex tracks there. For example,

PHOTOS BY JOHN VELTRI ©AUTHENTICHENDRIX, LLC



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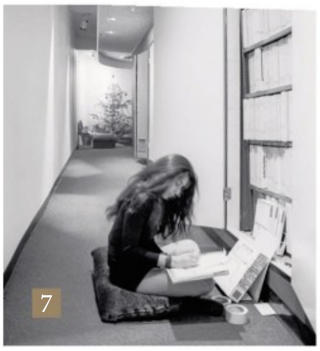

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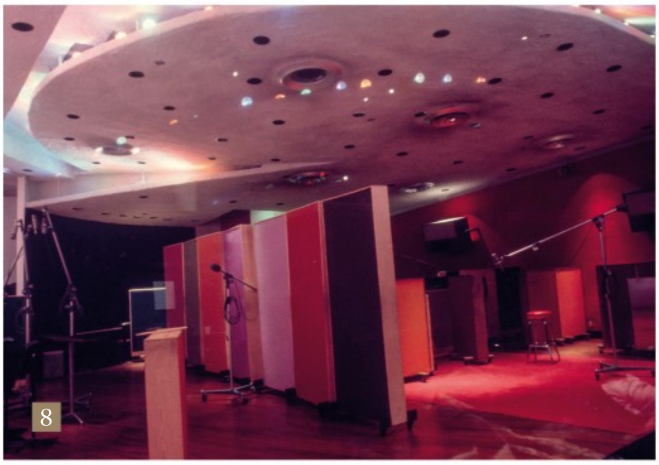

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6. Jimi playing live in May 1970, shortly before the studio was completed that summer

7. Cataloguing of Jimi's private tape closet in progress at the finished Electric Lady Studios

8. Lighting was a big part of the studio's magic. "We'd just dial in this beautiful vibe, which helped to create the atmosphere of the music," says Eddie Kramer

PHOTO BY STEVE BRAKER © AUTHENTIC HENDRIX, LLC

PHOTOS BY JOHN VELTRI © AUTHENTIC HENDRIX, LLC

Freedom, if you go and listen to the *West Coast Seattle Boy* boxset, there's a May '70 live take, just the three guys on the floor instrumentally doing *Freedom* because they're still developing it. But by the time you move the needle forward, timeline-wise, to June and July of 1970, they've built it up to this thing.

"You take a track like *Night Bird Flying*, let alone *Dolly Dagger*, and think about all the guitar overdubs interlaced through that piece. I mean, that comes with continuity. You can't get that from going to the Record Plant, coming back three weeks later, trying to restart it again. Jimi wasn't someone who would be able to present guys with charts and say, 'Okay, play this, do this, you'll come in here.' But so much time was jamming these songs in that room at Electric Lady that it became, like, 'Do you hear where I'm trying to go with this?' And as Eddie said, because they were so in tune, they were able to quickly get it. Like, 'Okay, yeah – here we go.'"

Eddie, you spoke to Jimi for the final time at Electric Lady, when he phoned to suggest you join him in London to record there instead?

Eddie: "Yeah, that phone call was very interesting. I reminded him, 'But Jimi, we've just spent all this money and it's a gorgeous studio.' And he was like, 'Yeah.' Almost like he was snapping back to reality. He told me, 'I'll see you in about a week.' He knew he had to come back and finish the album. And he was looking forward to it."

> **"[The studio energy] manifested itself immediately. Man, he was on fire"**
>
> *Eddie Kramer*

John: "Had Billy never gotten ill and had to leave the tour, and Jimi had just finished the shows and come home, you never know what would have happened on September 18. He might have been somewhere else that day. You just never know. Life doesn't work that way."

Do you feel like Hendrix had more to give as a guitarist, had he lived?

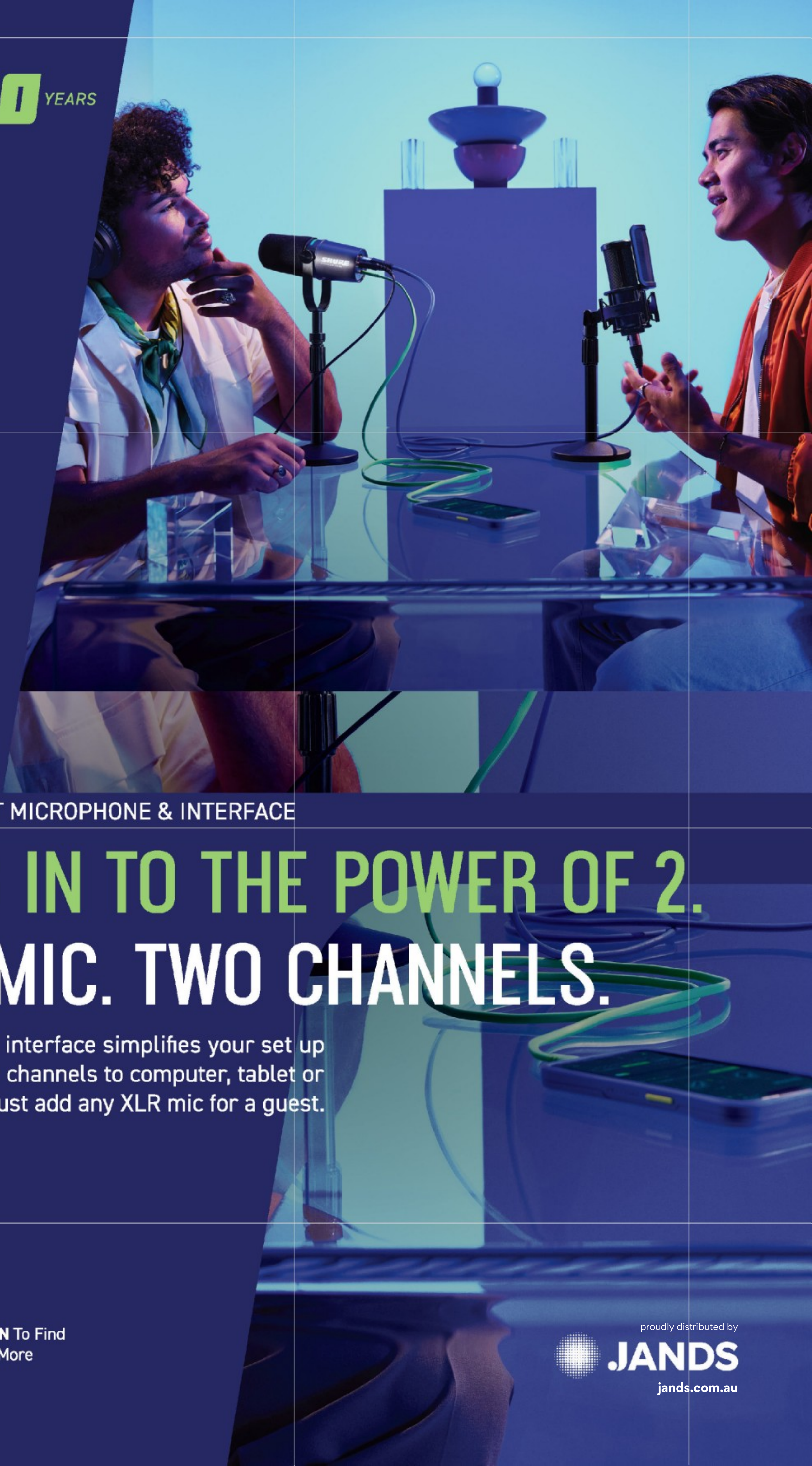
John: "Oh God, yes. Listen to the Monterey performance of '67 – which is an all-time classic – and then go two years later to listen to *Machine Gun*. Again, you're talking about three pedals, a guitar and Marshall amps. So it isn't as if there's some kind of magic technology going on. It's still one guy, two hands, making sounds that nobody else had ever made before. So that's the great tragedy of this. I mean, as you listen to *Night Bird Flying*, you think, 'Wow, think of what the next record could have been, with him trying horns and more keyboards.' Who knows?"

Eddie: "John's absolutely right. Jimi was on a rise, no question. I think the Band Of Gypsys was the key that opened the door because not only did it yield a fantastic album, but it also had that funk, blues, tough R&B vibe, which led to this beautiful open space for him to jam and really just stretch out for 15 minutes. That was the stepping stone. So his death was not only a shock to everybody, but it was premature in the sense of what he was thinking musically."

Finally, bands who record at Electric Lady Studios often say they can still sense Hendrix's presence. What do you think?

Eddie: "Oh, unquestionably. Y'know, you'll be mixing something, and it's like you get a little tap on your shoulder: 'You might not want to do that drum fill like that.' That studio has a mystique. I know musicians who are very empathetic and they walk in that room and they immediately feel something. And that's Jimi. They go, 'Okay, I can make some nice music in this place.' And they feel relaxed and the creative juices start to flow. It could be coincidental – but I like the other story."

Electric Lady Studios: A Jimi Hendrix Vision is out now on Experience Hendrix, LLC and Legacy Recordings
https://ajimihendrixvision.com



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OF RUN TIME[1]

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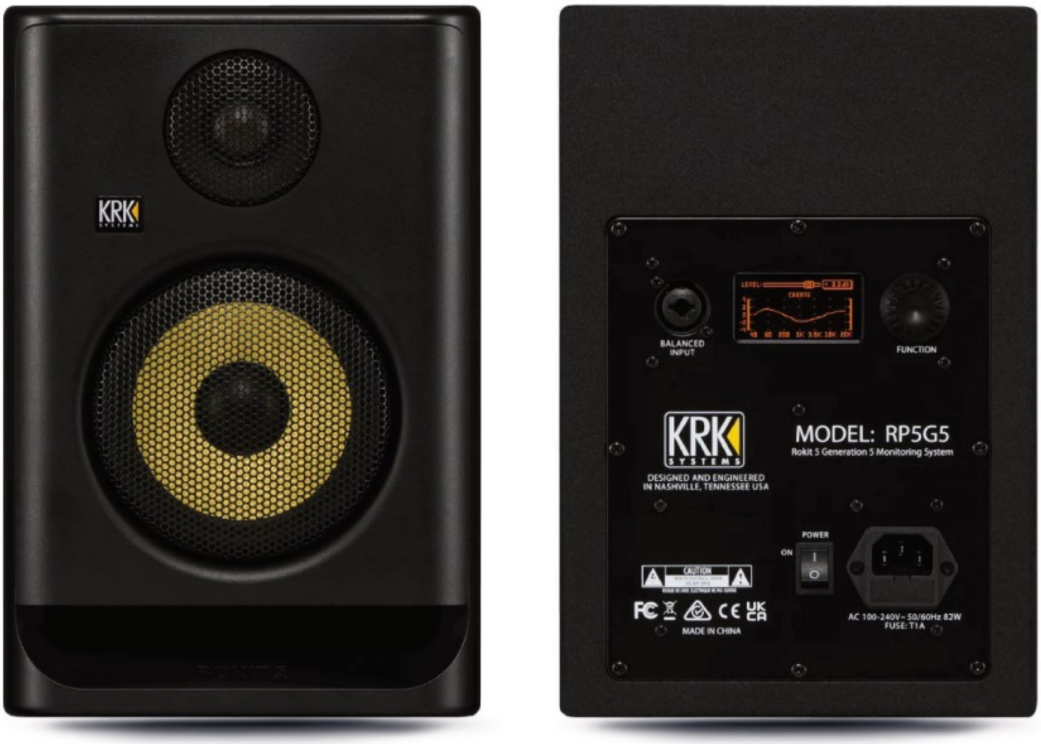


KRK Rokit 5 G5

KRK's excellent Rokit monitors have been updated. We get talking about the new generation. Review by **Jon Musgrave.**

RRP $369 **CONTACT** Jands **WEB** jands.com.au

KRK's Rokit series is one of the most established monitor ranges, and although very affordable and considerably cheaper than its flagship V Series, they offer great sonics and decent features.

The new fifth generation release has three models built around 5, 7 and 8 inch woofers, and it's the smallest Rokit 5 Generation Five we have for review. Before we get started, it's worth mentioning that although these monitors replace the fourth generation Rokits, the third generation Rokits are still available and are known as the Classic Series. So if you'd rather have physical controls and Class A/B amplification at a similar price point, it's worth bearing these in mind.

> **"The Rokit 5 Generation Five is ideal for smaller rooms and spaces and also suitable for surround applications."**

The Rokit 5 G5 is a 2-way front-ported, bi-amped monitor with Class D amplification. At first glance it looks very similar to its predecessor, and once again speaker volume and EQ are both accessed via the rear menu-driven LCD screen and rotary encoder. Even so, there are some changes, most notably the 1 inch silk dome tweeter. The monitor ships with two detachable baffle faceplates so you can have either open or grille-covered cones. In the box, you'll also find a 2-part foam-mounting pad. These shallow wedge-shaped pads allow for various mounting angles, and if you stack them appropriately can also be flat. For regular table or stand mounting you'll find the speakers also include a thin, high-density foam pad glued to the underside, while for bracket mounting there are mounting screw holes on the bottom.

The EQ option is split into high and low frequency bands and within these bands there are five preset options for each. The EQ is aimed at typical room tuning and boundary correction duties and offers cut/boost at fixed frequency points – 60Hz shelf and 200Hz peak for the low band, and 3.5kHz peak and 10kHz shelf for the high band.

In addition, and new to this generation, there are three global voicings: Mix, Focus and Create. As you might expect, Mix mode is flat, and thus provides the Rokit 5's intended studio monitoring sound. In this mode, and not unusual for smaller front-ported monitors, the low frequency punch delivered by the port leaves the low mids feeling slightly light. Even so, it's not a big worry, and if you do want a fuller sound and crisper highs, then this is what Create mode delivers. This mode also doubles as a great general listening/hi-fi setting.

Rounding things off, Focus mode emphasises the midrange. This isn't suited to mixing, but is definitely handy when editing, and it's ideal for dialogue projects. Cycling between the three modes is very easy using the LCD encoder, and this certainly facilitates changing modes for specific tasks.

The Rokit 5 Generation Five is ideal for smaller rooms and spaces and also suitable for surround applications. The new soft dome tweeter adds finesse to the top end and although there is plenty of scope to apply EQ, we really didn't feel the need to move that far from the factory flat setting, which is very encouraging. Overall, this is a great speaker and should definitely be on your audition shortlist.

Verdict

The latest compact monitor offers a more refined delivery than its predecessor, with flexible EQ to meet various usage scenarios.

PROS New silk dome tweeter. Three preset EQ voicings for common applications. Flexible 2-part mounting pads.

CONS Low-mids can be a little light in some modes.

Fender Bassman

Fender Tone Master '59 Bassman

Fender attempts the incredible feat of replicating the historic Bassman with a silicon heart in its latest addition to the Tone Master series.

Review by **Martin Smith**

RRP $2,499 **CONTACT** Fender Music Australia **PHONE** 02 8198 1300 **WEB** www.fender.com

The Fender Bassman is one of only a handful of historic amplifiers that have shaped the sound of the electric guitar as we know and love it. Since its release in 1952, the unmistakable throaty authority of the tweed 4x10 combo has had top players including such luminaries as Michael Bloomfield, Buddy Guy, Paul McCartney, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Eric Clapton enthralled.

The amp was so ubiquitous that Marshall used its two-channel, four-input design as a jumping off point for other classic amps in our hypothetical historic handful, starting with the JTM45. Ken Bran leaned heavily into the Bassman's circuit, albeit with UK valves and a UK-voiced tone stack, achieving a more aggressive midrange than Leo Fender would have ever allowed to leave the Fullerton factory. However, there are other things in heaven and on earth that Leo Fender may never have dreamed of, and perhaps the technological possibility of a fully digital Bassman may be one of them.

Fender has set a high bar here to produce a perfect replication of the original Bassman with modern enhancements. To that end, behold a beautifully lacquered tweed cabinet made of lightweight solid pine, loaded with a handsome set of grey-blue enamelled Alnico Jensen speakers, all topped off with a familiar chrome faceplate.

Visually, this amp is every bit as believable and authentic looking as its valve counterpart, save for the digital goodies on the back panel. Pick it up, however, and it's a very different story: it's so light you'd think they forgot the speakers. Lightweight is a very nice by-product of a valve-less, D2- design, not least for the ageing rockers among us. But that's all well and good only if it sings!

BRIGHT
NORMAL
BRIGHT
1
2
NORMAL

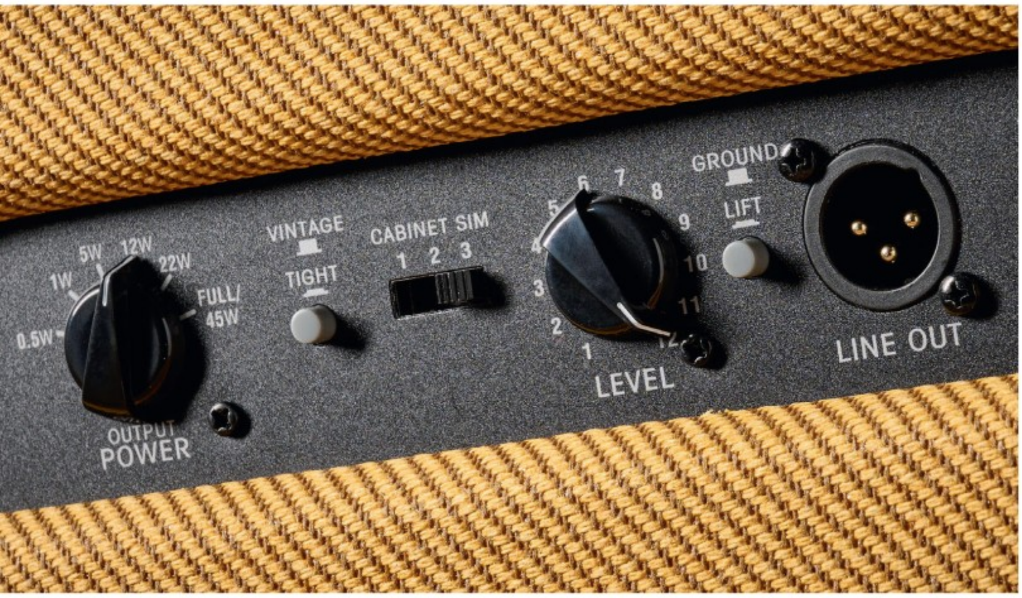
In Use

Firing up in standby mode, the corresponding jewel light changes colour from amber to green to indicate the amp is 'warmed up' (read: booted up) and we begin plugged into the Normal channel's low-gain input with all the tone controls in the mid position. This neutral start point helps us establish what the cab and speakers are delivering. Sat beside this new model here in our testing room we have a genuine vintage tweed Bassman as reference. We're immediately impressed by the Tone Masters valve-like top-end shimmer with a Strat. The ability to dial in a dose of spring reverb is a welcome feature never

NEIL GODWIN

Jensen
LOUDSPEAKER
SPECIAL DESIGN
MADE IN ITALY

Fender
PRESENCE
REVERB



before afforded to this amp model. It's a great-sounding emulation of a spring, though we noted that it didn't perhaps extend to the fully wet drip some valve-driven reverbs exhibit.

Overall, tonally, the Tone Master has more brightness available than the original, which sounds darker and woolier with matched settings. That said, we actually enjoyed the slightly more articulate top-end available from the Tone Master. While the vintage Bassman power stage starts to sag and saturate subtly at volumes over 3, the Tone Master still pumps out bold power, albeit with a valve-like compression that begs for a few heavy-duty Stevie Ray Vaughan riffs.

A big advantage of the digital version is the ability to juggle the output power against the gain control to achieve your desired blend of saturation at any volume level. Further tailoring of the output by way of the back-panel mounted Vintage-Tight switch brings a touch of focus and definition, more useful at higher volumes.

The original Bassman is known for getting along with all types of guitars and pedals, and this modern counterpart is a chip off the old block. It's gratifying to learn that the ability to jumper the two channels together via a patch cable has been replicated here, allowing for all the tone-blending capability that brings. The smooth character of the overdrive available belies its digital architecture and would surely outwit many valve purists in a blind test. The integration of an effects loop is a great addition to this amp, allowing for a connection to your time-based effects.

The Bright channel's normal gain input reveals the extra potential of the Bassman to saturate in all kinds of pleasing ways, and this new model does exactly that. It's a kind of classic overdrive mostly heard on the 60s and 70s recordings of the American blues greats, a softer midrange roar without the more pointed mids of the UK amps.

We had a chance to use this amp on stage for a theatre gig and it was immediately loved by the sound technician who got a great front-of-house sound by simply plugging his XLR lead into the cab IR output, sparing time for mic'ing up and the sound-spill that inevitably brings. A difference in response between the Class D power and a valve power section could be marginally felt, though not particularly heard. The spread of the four speakers provided a gratifying dispersal of sound that filled just the right amount of stage.

Verdict

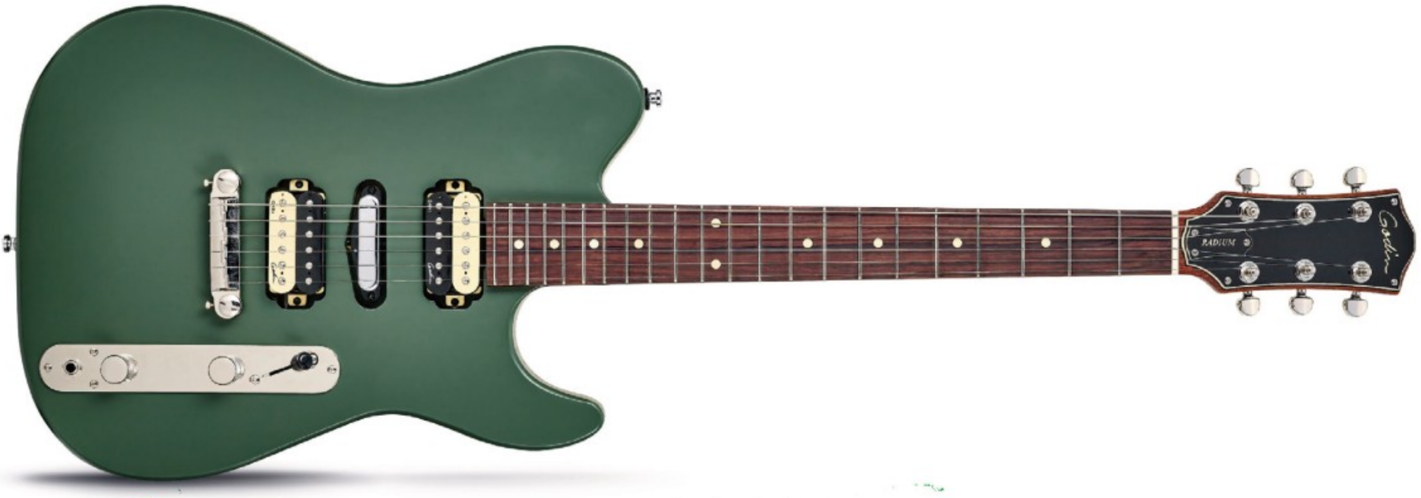
In many ways, this amp is far more versatile than its valve counterpart and we found it had much wider tonal versatility, too, especially thanks to the reverb that surely every original Bassman owner would put on their wishlist. Digital power has come a long way, and certainly at lower volumes this amp can behave just as you might expect a valve amp to. It may be argued that it doesn't collapse under sound pressure exactly like valves, but this isn't perhaps an amp that will be run on 11 in any case. The authentic pine and tweed cabinet, meanwhile, is certainly everything it should be, with its broad sound dispersal.

Fender's all-valve version is also available, albeit obviously at a much higher price, but you won't have access to the cab IRs, reverb or power scaling we find on the Tone Master.

So, here, Fender has produced a fantastic-sounding, lightweight amp for stage, studio and home that brings the Bassman tone into the digital age. What's more, the package is largely indiscernible from its mid-century forebear: this amp combines vintage sound and looks with digital features and convenience.

PROS Great tone, just like the original but with useful power scaling and IR outputs; the on-board convolution reverb is a welcome addition

CONS Higher price than many digital amps; reverb could have more depth; some experienced valve users may notice a lack of power-amp sag at high volumes



Godin Radium

Along with making guitars for Alex Lifeson, Godin's standard electric range has plenty to offer. We take this pared-down roots-rocker for a long overdue spin. Review by **Dave Burrluck.**

RRP $2,295 (inc gigbag) **CONTACT** Dynamic Music **PHONE** 02 9939 1299 **WEB** www.dynamicmusic.com.au

It's never been easy to pigeonhole Godin, the long-running Canadian maker, which turns its expansive hands to everything from affordable steel- and nylon-string acoustics to $6k-plus signature electric models. If there is a theme, it's practicality: good, solid craft that's always very fit for purpose.

This Radium is case in point. It was actually introduced at the start of 2020, in Carbon Black and Winchester Brown, just before Covid caused its havoc, while the Matte Green version you see here was announced in 2021. A change in distribution meant reviews were on hold, and while we managed to get our hands on the higher-end Radium-X with its LR Baggs X-Bridge back in issue 152, this base model slipped through the net.

"Presenting a new breed of single-cut guitars, which combines all the best elements of the Radiator and the Stadium into one: the Radium!" said Godin at its launch. It's a pretty close cousin to that same-shaped Godin Stadium (T-style bridge, two single coils, long scale and six-in-a-line headstock) and the Radiator (wrapover bridge, two humbuckers, short scale and three-a-side headstock). This is a straightforward design centring on a Gibson 'short'-scale mahogany neck glued into a solid Canadian Laurentian basswood body, and is available in a trio of demure finishes. The apparent slab-body elongated T-style design actually has a rear ribcage cutaway and rounding to the back of that bass-side horn – but little truck with any other comfort contours.

The trio of HSH pickups is direct-mounted, although the middle Tele-neck-style covered single coil and the bridge humbucker sit quite high out of the body as the bridge is a chunky wrapover type with stepped intonation ridge and overall intonation adjustment. Also top-mounted are the controls and output jack. These both sit on a lightly aged and similarly elongated T-style control plate, with the angled five-way lever pickup selector at the front, the output at the base, and wide-spaced volume and tone controls placed in between – the latter with a pull switch to simultaneously split those outer zebra 'buckers.

Feel & Sounds

Strapped on or seated, the Radium certainly feels familiar and fairly Tele-like. Overall weight is trim at 3.24kg and the satin-finish neck feels special: a medium-depth C with quite sloping shoulders – 21.4mm in depth at the 1st fret and 23.5mm by the 12th. The classic feel is enhanced by well-installed medium-gauge frets on the 305mm (12-inch) radiused unbound rosewood fingerboard with a nice classic incurve to the edges.

There's a very appealing smooth, sustaining acoustic response that's married to that classic feel, making the Radium feel like an old friend, rather than a new guitar you're taking on a first date. Sound-wise, there's nothing that's going to upset, either, with a big, thick, overwound voice at the bridge and a more vintage-y sound at the neck. Thanks to the five-way lever switch, we drop into more Strat-like voicings in positions 2 and 4 and a slightly muted centre single coil. With that tone control switch pulled up (which voices only the screw coils of the humbuckers), it's a very usable hardtail S-style, while both humbuckers are cleaner and brighter – but not overly so. We might be tempted to add a treble bleed to the volume control just to maximise the clarity with reduced settings, especially if you use a less gained amp voice. But, overall, it does exactly what it says on the tin.

Verdict

If the Radium displays quite a mash-up of style with an almost T-style vibe married to its 'Gibson' scale-length set neck and wrapover bridge, it certainly covers some ground, sound-wise. There's the beefy rock-aimed 'buckers that split well, and with that middle single coil in play it dips into a Strat's sonic palette.

Our sample was ready for action from the off with a great-feeling neck, good setup and no tuning issues, and it really exemplifies that fit-for-purpose Godin proposition. Now, it ain't hip, but it's pretty fairly priced for a North American-made guitar, not least compared to Gibson USA's start-up models. It's an instrument this writer would happily head off to a gig with, no hesitation. Godin isn't every player's first choice, but for anyone looking for that slightly different vibe, you'll find it here in spades with excellent quality to match.

> "There's a very appealing smooth, sustaining acoustic response that's married to that classic feel, making the Radium feel like an old friend, rather than a new guitar you're taking on a first date"

PROS Very competently made in stripped-down style; excellent neck shape and playability; good weight; pretty expansive sounds

CONS Bridge and middle pickup sit quite high from the body face; that screw-on plastic headstock might be a retro detail too far

PHIL BARKER

OLLY CURTIS

Gretsch Professional Series Hollow Body Tennessean

The working musician’s hollowbody designed to handle most popular styles but retaining that unmistakably cool Gretsch vibe. Review by **Neville Marten.**

RRP $4,299 (inc case) **CONTACT** Fender Australia **PHONE** 02 8198 1300 **WEB** www.gretschguitars.com

Debuting in 1958, the 6119 Tennessean was the least fancy of the four Chet Atkins models available from Gretsch. Eschewing the Western bling of the other instruments – including the 6120 beloved of Eddie Cochran, the 6122 Country Gentleman favoured by Atkins himself, and the Les Paul-sized 6121 chambered ‘solidbody’ Round-Up – it featured just one Filter’Tron humbucker at the bridge and was played most notably by The Beatles’ George Harrison, albeit in later form.

Although nominally a 406mm (16-inch) wide single-cutaway hollowbody, the Tennessean’s depth wavered during its first few years until settling on the 64mm (2.5-inch) we see today. However, the most notable change came when Gretsch added a neck pickup, significantly enhancing the guitar’s versatility. The Tennessean’s colour choice of Deep Cherry Stain or Walnut further separated it from the other Chet Atkins models, which usually came in the more familiar Gretsch orange. Harrison’s was a 1963 model in red with dual Filter’Tron pickups.

Shift forward six decades and the Tennessean is back. Looking much like its Brooklyn-built forbear – with arched laminated maple body, bound all-round in white, a two-piece maple neck with dark centre stripe and white heel cap, a bound rosewood fingerboard, bound f-holes and twin Filter’Tron pickups – the Japanese-made model, however, aims to bring a more modern edge to this journeyman guitar. Hence on the B6CP Bigsby vibrato the strings feed through a hole in the rocker bar, rather than having to awkwardly locate the ball-end onto a steel peg. The top’s ‘trestle’ bracing has been updated to Gretsch’s new Arc-Tone system that company literature describes as “torrefied maple tone bars with arc-shaped spruce support braces located underneath the bridge area”. Said to promise “enhanced sustain, crisp note attack and excellent feedback control”, it should allow the Tennessean to handle powerful overdrive without the inherent issues associated with all-hollow instruments.

Other nods to the modern age include Gotoh locking tuners to aid tuning stability, Grover straplocks, and an Adjusto-Matic bridge that’s perched atop a pinned rosewood foot.

The Tennessean’s U-shaped neck carries a 305mm (12-inch) radius bound rosewood fingerboard with 22 medium jumbo frets. The ’board’s edges have been rolled for playing comfort, while the beautifully profiled frets invite eager hands to play. Nickel hardware with grey pickguard and pickup rings work well against the flawless Deep Cherry gloss, the whole thing looks crisp and smart and, as we’d expect from Japan, expertly put together.

Feel & Sounds

Although Gretsch describes the Tennessean’s neck as Standard U shape, it feels like a regular C profile with a depth of 20mm at the 1st fret and 23mm by the 10th before it fattens into the heel. It’s very comfy and not tiring to play over long stints. Indeed, so well are the fingerboard edges rolled and the frets so expertly finished that it’s a pleasure to simply sit and noodle. And with its classic radius, slightly shorter-than-usual 625mm (24.6-inch) scale length and medium jumbo frets, it welcomes all manner of fretboard antics, with bends and vibrato beautifully served on the 11-gauge strings. Like Gibson’s ES-330, ultra high-end forays are off the agenda, but blues-rock soloing at the 12th position is perfectly doable. And although said Gibbo is lighter than our Gretsch due to the latter’s deeper body and significant metalware, it’s still an easy instrument to wield on a strap.

Electrics-wise, today’s Tennessean is a simpler beast than the model of times past, with a master volume mounted on the cutaway’s horn, individual pickup volumes, master tone, and three-way pickup selector. It’s quite intuitive, and through our test rig of a Mark I Reissue Boogie combo, plus Hudson Broadcast, Lovepedal Hermida Zendrive, Providence chorus and Echoplex delay pedals, it delivers a wonderful array of tones. With the bridge pickup set clean and a dash of almost slap-back echo, we’re treated to a glistening, musical tone. Bright and chiming, it’s perfect for rock ’n’ roll lead, fingerpicked chords and clean riffs.

Similarly, the neck Filter’Tron – both on its own and in tandem with the bridge – oozes warmth, clarity and class. You can see why the rockabilly players loved it. But in the hands of a total musician like Chet Atkins, the sonic landscape is all but boundless.

Players such as Neil Young, Stephen Stills and, of course, the great Malcolm Young have made wonderful distorted noises on Gretsch guitars. And stepping on the Zendrive and off the Echoplex, leaving only a dribble of Boogie reverb, we’re treated to the kind of tones a Gibson doesn’t quite do. On the bridge, it’s strident, articulate and almost sweet, while flipping to the neck things become warm and, yes, the old clichés ‘woody and flutey’, somewhere between Les Paul light and Strat heavy. With both pickups on things become thinner, more vowelly and definitely funkier.

Ray Butts’ Filter’Tron is a markedly different animal from Seth Lover’s humbucker. Is it clearer? More focused? Sharper? Possibly all three, but we’d hesitate to say better.

It’s great to see the return of guitars like the Gibson ES-330 and this delightful Gretsch Tennessean. A simpler offering than many guitars in the stable on its release, the model found favour with players who loved ‘that great Gretsch tone’ but were less enamoured by cowboys, cacti and steer horns, simply wanting a purposeful guitar that looked fabulous, played well and sounded right.

The Tennessean of 2024 is an altogether less idiosyncratic, more intuitive but still distinctly handsome machine. That it’s beautifully built, plays and feels like a much more modern proposition, and supplies all manner of brilliant sounds from shimmering cleans to snarling driven tones is testament to the work that Gretsch has put in. But let’s also doff our caps to the old guard: designer Jimmie Webster, pickup guru Ray Butts and, of course, inspirational genius Chet Atkins.

If Gretsch guitars have passed you by, nip down to your local guitar store and audition a Tennessean through a good amp with a decent pedal or two. You may just be converted. And since it’s likely to street for not much over the two grand mark, you’ll be getting some serious bang for your buck, too.

PROS Beautifully built, with sensible modern twists, a great-feeling neck and an inspiring range of wonderful tones

CONS Some players might rue the lack of upper-fret access here

Martin D-X2E Brazilian 12-string

A gorgeous and affordable 12-string for that symphony orchestra feel. Review by **Chris Gill.**

RRP $1,499 **CONTACT** Martin Guitar **WEB** martinguitar.com

If you want that "symphony orchestra in your hands" sensation that only a 12-string acoustic can provide, my mantra is "go big or go home." That usually means a jumbo or dreadnought model. If dreadnought is your preference, a Martin 12-string is a wise choice as they not only invented and perfected the dreadnought acoustic but they've also been making 12-string acoustics longer than any other company on the market today — just over 60 years, as a matter of fact.

The Martin D-X2E Brazilian is an affordably priced 12-string acoustic-electric that delivers incredible value and should induce serious consideration from guitarists looking to add some 12-string magic to their stage and studio performances.

Build & Playability

You may have read the word "Brazilian" then looked at the price and wondered if Martin have lost their minds by offering a Brazilian rosewood guitar for less than $1,500. Actually, the back and sides are made of HPL (high-pressure laminate) formulated to provide performance similar to Brazilian rosewood as well as the uncanny look of Brazilian from its dark chocolate hues to distinctive stripe grain patterns. The money Martin saved using HPL gave them more leeway to build the D-X2E 12-string with an upgraded spruce top featuring a satin finish and scalloped spruce braces. Martin is more secretive about the material used for the neck, fingerboard and bridge, cryptically describing it only as "select hardwood," but it looks and feels great and seems more than up to the job at hand.

The D-X2E 12-string comes strung with extra-light phosphor bronze strings, which play comfortably. The 25.4-inch scale length, 1 7/8-inch nut width and slim PA neck profile combine to provide comfortable playability with ample room between the individual string courses to facilitate clean chord fingering.

The Martin D-X2E 12-string delivers classic Martin 12-string dreadnought tone with full-bodied bass, rich mids, jangly treble and reverb-like resonance. It sounds equally great accompanying a solo folk singer as it does in a full band context adding sparkle when layered with an electric rhythm guitar, doubling melodic lead lines or taking an acoustic lead spotlight. The built-in Martin E-1 electronics are uncomplicated and deliver clear, natural amplified tones. Volume and tone controls are concealed within the soundhole above the low E string along with a phase switch and switch for the built-in chromatic tuner, with its display located below the high E string.

Verdict

The Martin D-X2E Brazilian 12-string is the perfect affordable choice for guitarists who want to add an acoustic 12-string with classic tone to their rig. The built-in electronics are an unexpected bonus that add even more value to the guitar's studio and stage versatility.

PROS **HPL back and sides have the natural, organic look of real Brazilian rosewood. String spacing is ideal for clean chord fingering. Built-in electronics system with tuner is easy to use and provides warm, natural acoustic tones**

CONS **Appearance is somewhat austere, but this model is more about performance and function instead of flashy looks**

> **"The Martin D-X2E Brazilian is an affordably priced 12-string acoustic-electric that delivers incredible value"**

C.F. Martin & Co EST. 1833
Series

MARTIN GUITAR

Yamaha TAG3 C TransAcoustic Guitar

Onboard effects in a pro-level acoustic. Review by **Chris Gill.**

RRP $2,999 **CONTACT** Yamaha **WEB** au.yamaha.com

The acoustic guitar has always had a distinct advantage as a highly portable “orchestra in a box,” but in 2016 when Yamaha introduced its TransAcoustic technology, which produces entirely self-contained reverb and chorus effects within the acoustic’s sound chamber without external effects or amplification, they greatly expanded the tonal and textural universe for the purely acoustic player.

The Yamaha TAG3 C TransAcoustic guitar introduces the second generation of TransAcoustic technology with improved reverb and chorus effects and the addition of delay effects and looper functions. Yamaha currently offers this technology built into an attractive cutaway dreadnought model with either a natural or sand burst finish.

Build Quality

At its core, the Yamaha TAG3 C is a pro-level acoustic constructed using quality traditional tone woods that include solid Sitka spruce (top), mahogany (solid back and sides, neck) and ebony (fingerboard, bridge). The body has a mirror-like gloss finish, while the neck is sprayed with a matte finish. The overall appearance is relatively understated and austere, lacking fretboard inlays and headstock decorations (other than a Yamaha brand decal) and featuring single-layer black body binding, with the soundhole rosette’s blue ripple pattern providing the only attention-getting eye candy.

The TransAcoustic electronics and actuators (the devices that convert string vibrations into processed signals that are transmitted into the acoustic chamber) are hidden out of view internally. The only telltale signs of the technology within are a set of four control knobs arranged in a clover-leaf pattern surrounding a central power switch and a slotted port for a magnetic plug that recharges the Li-ion battery, both located on the upper bass bout. The battery charge lasts for about five-and-a-half hours of continuous use.

A line output jack all the TAG3 C to function as an acoustic-electric. Natural acoustic and effect processed sounds and looper signals are output together through this jack.

Playability

The TAG3 C’s relatively flat 15 ¾-inch fingerboard radius, 20 medium frets, 11.0mm string spacing and slim C-shaped neck profile offer comfortable playability, and the cutaway provides easy access up to the 18th fret (the 19th and 20th frets require a bit of a stretch). Our example was perfectly set up from the factory and strung with Elixir Nanoweb 80/20 Bronze light strings.

Using the built-in TransAcoustic effects is super easy — just press the central button to turn on the power then dial in the effects you want. Each effect is 100 percent dry with its corresponding knob turned fully counterclockwise and turning it clockwise increase the effect’s volume/wet setting. The looper section involves more complex sequences to engage record, overdub, delete, undo and redo functions, but the processes are easy to remember once they’ve been performed a few times. Start and stop functions can be engaged via the side-mounted controls or by tapping the sensor located underneath the circle on the guitar’s top located on the cutaway horn just a few inches below the soundhole and within easy reach while playing.

Sounds

By itself with the TransAcoustic effects, the TAG3 C delivers all the warm, expressive natural acoustic sounds that players look for from a high-quality flattop dreadnought. The bass, mids and treble are better balanced that a typical square-shouldered dreadnought, with the mids in particular exhibiting nice body and presence while the bass is now overpowering and the treble is crisp but not harsh.

The TransAcoustic effects are still thrilling to hear coming from an unplugged acoustic. The reverb and chorus effects sound even more luxurious and rich than before, and the delay effects are nice additions that expand the system’s capabilities in a highly useful manner. Note that the effects can be modified using the TAG Remote App, which communicates with the guitar via a wireless Bluetooth connection. The app allows users to adjust effect parameters and select effect variations like room, hall and plate reverb, analog or simple delay and double detune or four-voice chorus.

Verdict

The Yamaha TAG3 C is well worth its price for its stellar natural acoustic tones and playability alone, but when you add in the incredible expanded sonic versatility of its TransAcoustic effects and looper function it becomes an outstanding bargain. Thanks to TransAcoustic technology, playing unplugged is no longer a compromise, and guitarists can now enjoy lush studio effects and textures anywhere they go and feel like playing.

PROS Outstanding tones woods and construction. Quality reverb, chorus and delay effects that nicely complement acoustic playing styles and tones. Looper greatly enhances solo performance capabilities with its record and overdub functions

CONS Players who prefer more ornate acoustics may find its appearance austere. Controlling looper functions is not intuitive and requires a few practice runs to become used to necessary control sequences

PHIL BARKER

Lava ME Air

Lava is hellbent on revolutionising the acoustic guitar. Forget what you know about spruce and cedar – this one's boasting about carbon fibre and onboard effects. Review by **Stuart Williams.**

RRP From $749 **CONTACT** Lava Music **WEB** www.lavamusic.com

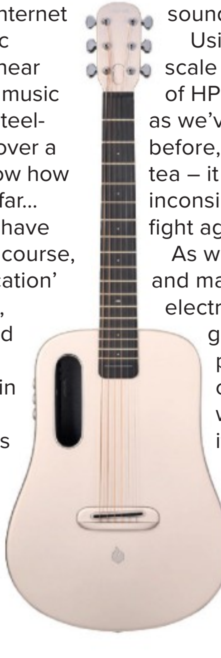
As we reach the second quarter of this century, it seems that nothing is safe from the 'smart' revolution. What started with our phones and TVs has made its way through our rigs and, now, the movement that we're calling 'The Internet of Strings' has reached our acoustic guitars. "About bloomin' time!" we hear you cry. Because it's true, no good music has been made on an unplugged steel-string. Ever. You can't even hear it over a drummer and, frankly, we don't know how the dreadnought ever made it this far…

In case AI and interconnectivity have stifled your perception, we are, of course, being sarcastic. Plus, the 'smartification' of our strummers isn't exactly new, either. Lava Music has been around since 2013, and the Lava ME Air we're looking at here is the latest in its now fairly substantial line-up of acoustic guitars. Unfamiliar? Here's the nutshell.

It's a carbon-fibre bodied acoustic, with a 'honeycomb bionic' structure. This combo serves up a few benefits. It's lightweight and it increases strength and rigidity for durability and near impervious defence against the traditional acoustic guitar's biggest enemies: temperature and humidity fluctuations. Finally, carbon fibre is also pretty good at resonating and projecting sound.

Using a shorter 597mm (23.5-inch) scale length, the fingerboard is made of HPL (High-Pressure Laminate), just as we've seen on plenty of Martin guitars before, and – while not everyone's cup of tea – it does have the bonus of removing inconsistencies while also putting up a fight against humidity changes.

As well as the non-traditional looks and materials, the Lava ME is packing electronics that aim to bring the acoustic guitar into the 2020s. A magnetic pickup is nestled at the body end of the 'board; just as we've seen with Yamaha's TransAcoustic range, it's also home to digital effects. You don't even have to plug in to hear them! Add Bluetooth connection to the Lava+ app and an internal rechargeable battery (via a USB-C), and the Lava is looking rather smart indeed.



Feel & Sounds

Getting started with the manual, website and Lava+ app, you'll find it's all very Apple-inspired. Words such as 'unibody', overzealous inter-capped naming, and even the finish names (our review model is Silver, but it also comes in the oh-so-Cupertino Space Black). But get past that and keep your mind open.

Strumming our first chords, the tension from the strings at a shorter scale took a bit of adjusting to – barre chords felt slightly fatiguing and our hands got a bit cramped. Once you're over that, the next thing you'll notice is just how smooth the tuners are, followed by the sound. Unplugged, it's not an unpleasant response, but it's also not particularly characterful, either. This isn't a bad thing, but don't expect us to reach for the usual lexicon: it's an even, balanced, almost lab-grown flat response. Not too bright, not too bassy.

The fun really begins when you engage the effects, which include chorus, delay, reverb, auto-wah and pitch-shift. These are controlled by three knobs on the guitar's shoulder. The control on the far right switches through presets with a press (and serves as the volume control when plugged in), while the other two controls are assignable. Each of the presets blends two effects, and out of the box the controls are already assigned to common parameters such as delay rate or reverb mix. Start playing unplugged and you'll probably grin the first time you hear your sound swirling and repeating its way out of the soundhole. It's addictive – and they sound good, too. We did experience some digital noise when switching between presets, mostly due to killing reverb and delay tails abruptly.

Plugged in, we can blend between the blade-style magnetic pickup and a rather vaguely described 'acoustic simulation' via a soundhole-mounted volume wheel. There's no latency with the latter, and to our ears it certainly doesn't sound synthetic. The magnetic sound is decent, too, with a bit more brightness and the midrange brittle sound that we'd expect. Of course, the effects are also routed through the output, so you can make use of them in a live setting or, ironically, enjoy your acoustic guitar through your headphones.

Verdict

Overall, the Lava ME Air surprised us. What ran the risk of being a toy-like guitar actually proved to be some serious fun, and the fact that we found ourselves immersed in the sonic side of it long enough to make us late for our deadline is probably the biggest benchmark. Is it perfect? No, but it kept us playing. And in a world where 'smart' things turn our attention away from instruments, we can't say fairer than that.

PROS Slick design; great-sounding amplified effects; addictive playing experience married with good standard acoustic sounds

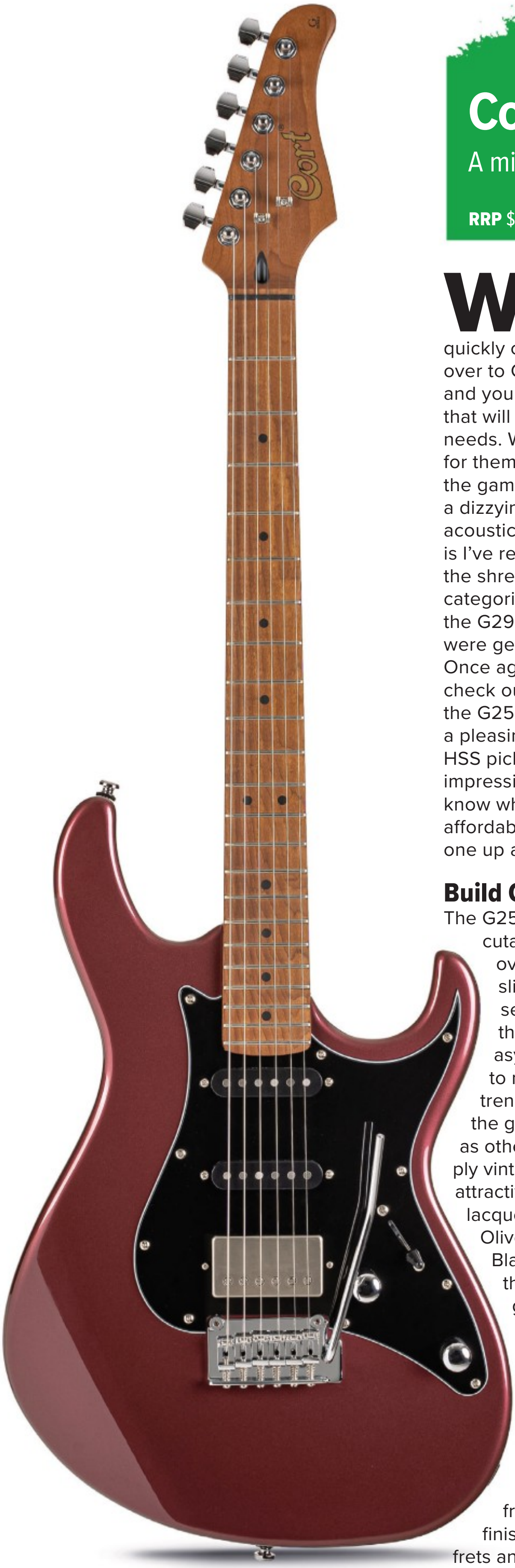
CONS Slightly uncomfortable playability; lots of fluffy information/instructions; it's a big departure for traditionalists

PHIL BARKER

Cort G250 SE

A mindblowingly inexpensive modern classic. Review by **Paul Riario.**

RRP $699 **CONTACT** Dynamic Music **PHONE** 02 9939 1299 **WEB** www.dynamicmusic.com.au



CORT

Whether you're a novice, a shredder or even a dabbler, there's a guitar that Cort can quickly curate for you. How so? Just head over to Cort's comprehensive website and you'll find a trio of dropdown menus that will generate the ideal guitar for your needs. While this sounds like I'm shilling for them, rest assured, I have no skin in the game; Cort has done just fine selling a dizzying amount of guitars, basses and acoustics without my help. What I can say is I've reviewed a few of the firm's guitars in the shredder and the more contemporary categories — the KX700 Evertune and the G290 FAT II, respectively — and both were genuinely outstanding instruments. Once again, I had the opportunity to check out Cort's latest modern classic, the G250 SE, which ticks all the boxes in a pleasing double-cutaway design with an HSS pickup configuration that's invitingly impressive in playability and tone. But you know what's bonkers? It comes with an affordable price tag that makes scooping one up all the more enticing.

Build Quality

The G250 SE has the familiar double-cutaway curves found on typical overseas S-style guitars with the slightly elongated upper horn. What sets it apart from others is the fact that its basswood body is slightly asymmetrical, making it appealing to many players digging on the trendier offset designs. From there, the guitar shares the same aesthetic as other S-styles by having a three-ply vintage black pickguard framing its attractive appearance in four muted and lacquered finishes of Ocean Blue Grey, Olive Dark Green, Vivid Burgundy and Black. Roasted maple necks with their tried-and-true stability and golden brown hues are currently "de rigueur," and Cort is on point offering it here as the guitar's bolted-on choice at no additional charge. The guitar does away with the common squared-off neck heel and replaces it with a smoothly beveled one for an effortless approach past the 15th fret. Also, the slim, C-profile neck is finished in satin with 22 medium jumbo frets and black dot inlays and features a 25½" scale length. The G250 SE's vintage voice is powered by Cort's Voiced Tone pickups with a VTH-59 bridge humbucker paired with two VTS-63 single coil pickups, controls for volume and tone (with coil-tap) and a five-way selector switch. The guitar floats a two-point vibrato bridge with steel bent saddles, but you'll need to be judicious in your vibrato throw to not go out of tune because the guitar comes with die-cast (non-locking) tuners.

Performance & Sounds

It used to be that guitars with pinpoint playability and minimal upgrades in hardware and electronics would be straddling the $1,200 mark, but now — at nearly half the price — the G250 SE seriously competes with those instruments and exceeds all expectations. From fit to finish, it's staggering how good this guitar feels and sounds, making it nearly impossible to fault. Setup was fairly good, but, as an experienced player, I made some minor adjustments in dropping the action by lowering the two-point vibrato bridge and a slight truss rod tweak of the neck. Playability felt effortless on its floating bridge in combination with the player-friendly carve on its roasted neck. Cort's Voiced Tone pickups are somewhat vintage-flavored, as evidenced by their mid-output and neutral tonal coloration. You can argue they lack the complexity or fuller-bodied tones of other popular brands, but what you'll hear instead is a prominent glassy sparkle from the single coils and a firm, chunky bite from the humbucker. The coil-tapped bridge makes an audible difference in tone without losing output, and when you factor in the combined brightness of bolt-on construction and a roasted maple neck, the guitar's overall sound snaps with biting clarity.

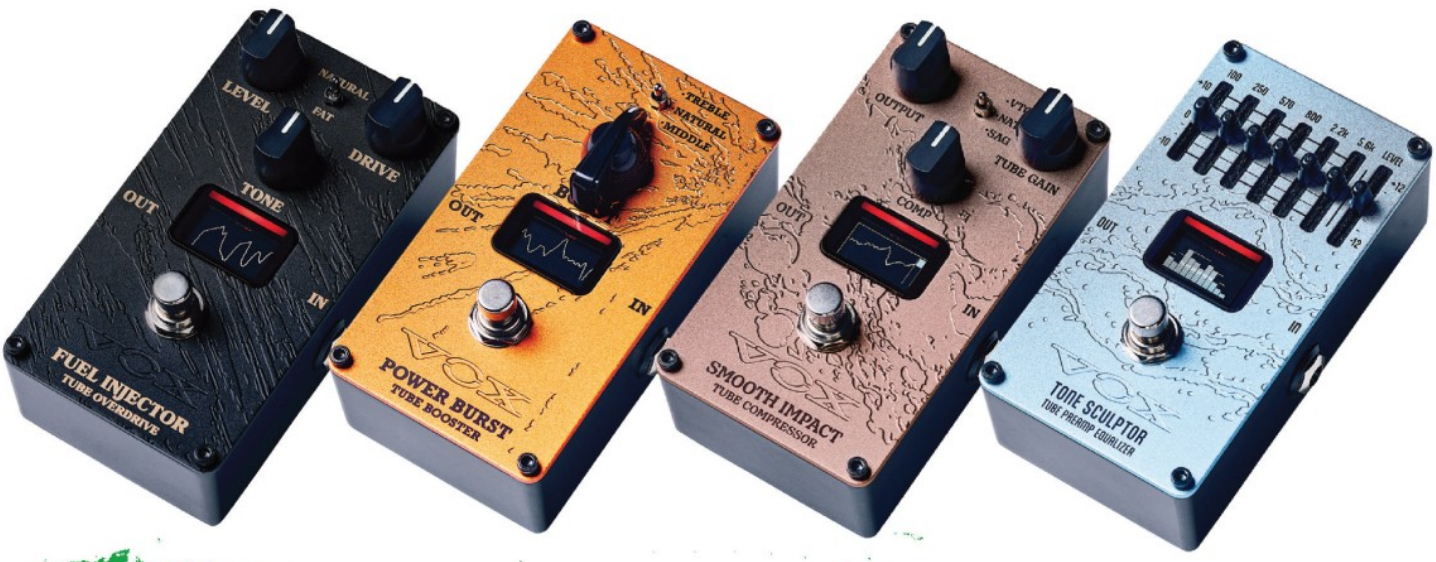
Verdict

A true modern classic with a price that's within reach for many players, Cort's G250 SE raises the bar in quality for a double cutaway guitar with player-centric upgrades. Whether it serves as your main guitar or as a backup, the G250 SE is a solid workhorse and a real joy to play.

> **"Exceeds all expectations. From fit to finish, it's staggering how good this guitar feels and sounds, making it nearly impossible to fault."**

PROS Affordable in price and high in quality. Roasted maple neck ensures stability and reliability. Player-friendly neck profile and medium jumbo frets provide easy playabilit. Cort's mid-output Voiced Tone pickups produce brighter clarity and snap. Two-point vibrato is smooth and solid

CONS None at this price



Vox Valvenergy 2nd Series pedals

Rich harmonic tube overtones without the hassle. Review by **Chris Gill.**

RRP $349 (Fuel Injector, Power Burst — each); $289 (Smooth Impact, Tone Sculptor — each) **CONTACT** Vox Amplification **WEB** voxamps.com

Vox first introduced its Nutube technology in a series of micro amps back in 2017, followed by their first series of Valvenergy pedals featuring an all-analog signal path and Nutube tech in 2021. Nutube involves a genuine miniature vacuum tube adapted from vacuum fluorescent display (VFD) technology to function like a traditional tube but with low-current and low-voltage specs.

The new second series of Vox Valvenergy pedals consists of the Fuel Injector Tube Overdrive, Power Burst Tube Booster, Smooth Impact Tube Compressor and Tone Sculptor Tube Preamp Equalizer. As with the previous series, these Valvenergy pedals employ Nutube to provide the dynamic responsiveness and rich harmonic overtones of traditional tube technology but without bulky designs and maintenance issues.

Build Quality

Each Valvenergy pedal is housed in a sturdy metal case that's slightly wider and taller than a Phase 90. Because of the higher than average power consumption, using a 9VDC power adapter is recommended but an easy-access battery compartment is also provided. A Link jack allows users to connect multiple pedals together and switch between them with one foot-switch.

Controls are straightforward. The Fuel Injector overdrive provides a typical three-knob (Level, Drive, Tone) configuration plus a Natural/Fat toggle switch. The Power Burst booster offers a single Boost knob (about 20dB, but due to the character of the NuTube it will compress and distort at higher levels) plus a 3-position toggle with Treble, Natural and Middle settings. Smooth Impact's compressor controls consist of Output, Comp and Tube Gain knobs and a toggle with Vintage/Natural/Sag settings. Tone Sculptor combines preamp overdrive and graphic EQ in a single box with six EQ sliders (100Hz, 250Hz, 570Hz, 800Hz, 2.2kHz and 5.6kHz) with 10dB boost/cut and a +/-12dB Level slider. All four pedals include an illuminated graphic waveform display instead of a typical on/off LED. This feature is particularly helpful with the compressor as it shows how much the effect is adjusting the signal and decay, while on the other pedals it's more of a novelty.

Sounds

The overall tonal character and responsiveness of all four pedals is indeed quite tubular as promised. The Smooth Impact's compression effects sound especially natural without any pumping or squashed textures. Pick attack is articulate and notes sustain with impressive body without boosting noise. The overall character is more studio processor than typical stompbox compression.

The Tone Sculptor's graphic EQ makes it perfect for players who want more control over dialing in lead tones than typical overdrive pedals offer. The EQ bands are ideal for natural-sounding guitar tones with bass that sounds full but not flabby, mids with expressive voice-like qualities and treble that cuts without being harsh. Performance is noise-free.

The Fuel Injector covers familiar "tube" overdrive territory, but in this case it actually delivers true tube saturation and expressive dynamics. The Tone knob is limited, but with the Fat toggle switch engaged users can dial in an attractive midrange bump. Power Burst offers a little more sonic versatility than a typical "clean" boost pedal thanks to its Treble and Middle settings, but it's really best for giving some extra push to a tone you already love. The highest output level can easily push a tube amp into overdrive/distortion territory, and it sounds equally effective with clean or distorted amp settings.

Verdict

If you simply can't live without the dynamic responsiveness and smooth, musical harmonic overtones of real tube technology but don't want the hassles of hot operating temperatures, costly and regular maintenance and bulky designs, the Vox Valvenergy second series pedals are worth strong consideration. The Fuel Injector and Power Burst pedals aren't necessarily revolutionary, but they're great alternatives to common solid-state options. The Smooth Impact compressor and Tone Sculptor preamp/graphic EQ offer less common approaches to their effects with the distinct advantages of tube warmth and impressive, studio-quality performance.

These Valvenergy pedals employ Nutube to provide the dynamic responsiveness and rich harmonic overtones of traditional tube technology but without bulky designs and maintenance issues."

PROS ONutube technology provides true tube performance and sounds without hassle. Smooth Impact provides studio-quality natural-sounding compression effects. Tone Sculptor combines preamp and graphic EQ in a single package. Fuel Injector and Power Burst pedals' tone toggles expand tonal options

CONS Illuminated display provides eye candy but little useful info (Smooth Impact is an exception). Fuel Injector and Power Burst have limited EQ shaping capabilities

BOSS GX-10
EFFECTS ♩=120
IN
OUT
02-3
CRUNCH LEAD
AMP: GAIN 65
AMP: BASS 60
AMP: TREBLE 50
MEMORY LEVEL 100
1
2
3
4
SELECT ENTER: PUSH
OUTPUT LEVEL
EXP1 SW
◄ PAGE ►
MENU
EFFECTS
EXIT
WRITE
LOCK: HOLD
A·I·R·D
TUNER
MANUAL
C1

Boss GX-10

Boss takes the sound engine and touchscreen from its larger GX-100 and puts it in a compact, more affordable format. Review by **Trevor Curwen.**

RRP $549 **CONTACT** Boss **WEB** www.boss.info

Following a long line of GT processors, Boss moved to another prefix to release the GX-100 in 2022, the defining difference between that and its predecessors being the use of a touch display. Now we have a new model in that series, the GX-10, a more compact affair that cuts down on the number of footswitches but retains that touch display and has the same GX-100 sound engine at its heart.

Like its larger sibling, the GX-10 has been designed to undertake a multitude of tasks: it will function like a standard pedalboard in front of your amp to provide a massive range of effects, or can be connected direct to a PA or FRFR if you wish to make full use of the onboard amp and cab sims. That whole fully processed effects/amp/cab sound can also be used for silent practice through the headphone socket, or for recording sessions using the unit's capability as a 2-in/2-out USB audio interface. Its USB socket also opens up other possibilities, notably connection to the Boss Tone Studio software (on a Mac or Windows computer) that offers quick and easy editing and organisation of presets, as well as allowing you to load your own speaker cab IRs. With an internet connection, it also offers direct access to Boss Tone Exchange, an online platform for downloading and sharing sounds and more with other GX users.

If wireless editing from a mobile version of the app appeals to you, the GX-10 has a rear-panel socket to house the optional Bluetooth Audio MIDI Dual Adaptor. Other connections include send/return jacks to integrate favourite pedals into the signal chain (or initiate the four-cable method), plus a socket for expression pedal or up to two footswitches.

OLLY CURTIS

In Use

The GX-10 has 99 preset memories onboard that can't be overwritten, plus 198 user memories for storing your own sets of sounds. Memories are stored in banks of three and each memory has a chain of effects with up to 15 blocks that can include two amps. The chain can feature series and parallel routings, and you add effects to it simply by dragging blocks with a finger on the screen from an 'effects palette.'

The pedal provides 23 guitar amps and nine bass amps, many of them Boss originals sitting alongside a handful of well-known classics. The range is designed to cover just about all tonal needs with plenty of cabinet options available between those onboard and your own IRs. As for effects, there are 170 to choose from in all genres, many of them modelled recreations of Boss pedals. You also get a stereo looper with 19 seconds of looping time (38 seconds in mono).

Once you've got all your memories sorted, you have options on how to use the GX-10 in a live situation – all of which are pretty straightforward. There are three basic modes of operation that determine the functions of the three footswitches. The basic default is Up/Down Mode where the first two footswitches scroll up or down, loading the memories in sequential order. In this mode, the third footswitch (C1) operates an assigned function of the loaded memory like turning an effect on and off, initiating a parameter change or tap tempo.

If you press the second and third footswitches simultaneously, you enter Manual Mode. Here, the three footswitches – which can be individually set for toggle or momentary action – operate functions that you can assign to them in the selected memory. You'll most likely be switching individual effects in that memory in and out like standard pedalboard methodology, although there is the capability for changing up to 20 assignable parameters with just one press.

A third option is Bank Mode where you have a loaded bank of three memories and can select each memory in the bank with the footswitches (presses on two footswitches simultaneously will change banks). In this mode, you can also access parameter change by pressing the switch for the currently loaded memory.

The factory memories in the unit give you plenty to play with. There's some practical bread-and-butter effects chains with logical switching options for immediate use or to give you ideas when setting up your own memories.

If it's purely amp sounds you're looking for, then there are many great-sounding alternative options to consider these days with the rise of amp capture and dedicated single-amp pedals. But the modelled amps here are built with AIRD technology and are all playable, they respond well to dynamics and volume changes, and they should adequately cover the broad musical needs of most players with extra sonic flexibility available by stacking two amps together in parallel.

It's the effects, though, where the GX-10 really shines and it's worth the price of admission for these alone, all of which have plenty of editable parameters to tailor the sound to your exact taste. There's all the modulation effects, delays and reverbs that you are likely to need, including some specific Roland/Boss types such as the Space Echo, based on an RE-201, which offers six different playback head options, and the Tera Echo with its unique ambiences.

There's also plenty of variation in the range of overdrive, distortion and fuzz on offer, which includes classic Boss compact types like the SD-1, DS-1, BD-2 and Metal Zone, as well as the usual suspects from other brands. Quality pitch-shifting options abound, too, and there are loads of one-offs getting more into the realm of the esoteric – Feedbacker, Sitar Simulator, Ring Mod, Slicer and an emulation of the rare Slow Gear pedal. Whether you want to create a complex chain for a composite sound or simply construct 'pedalboards' with three switchable effects, you're well sorted here.

Verdict

This easily transportable do-it-all unit offers a way to get access to a load of Boss sounds for a reasonably affordable outlay. Whether used on its own or as a component on a standard pedalboard complemented by a few choice pedals, it can deliver an extensive range of sounds with solid and practical performance options provided by the inclusion of a treadle, and the flexibility of assigning functions to the footswitches.

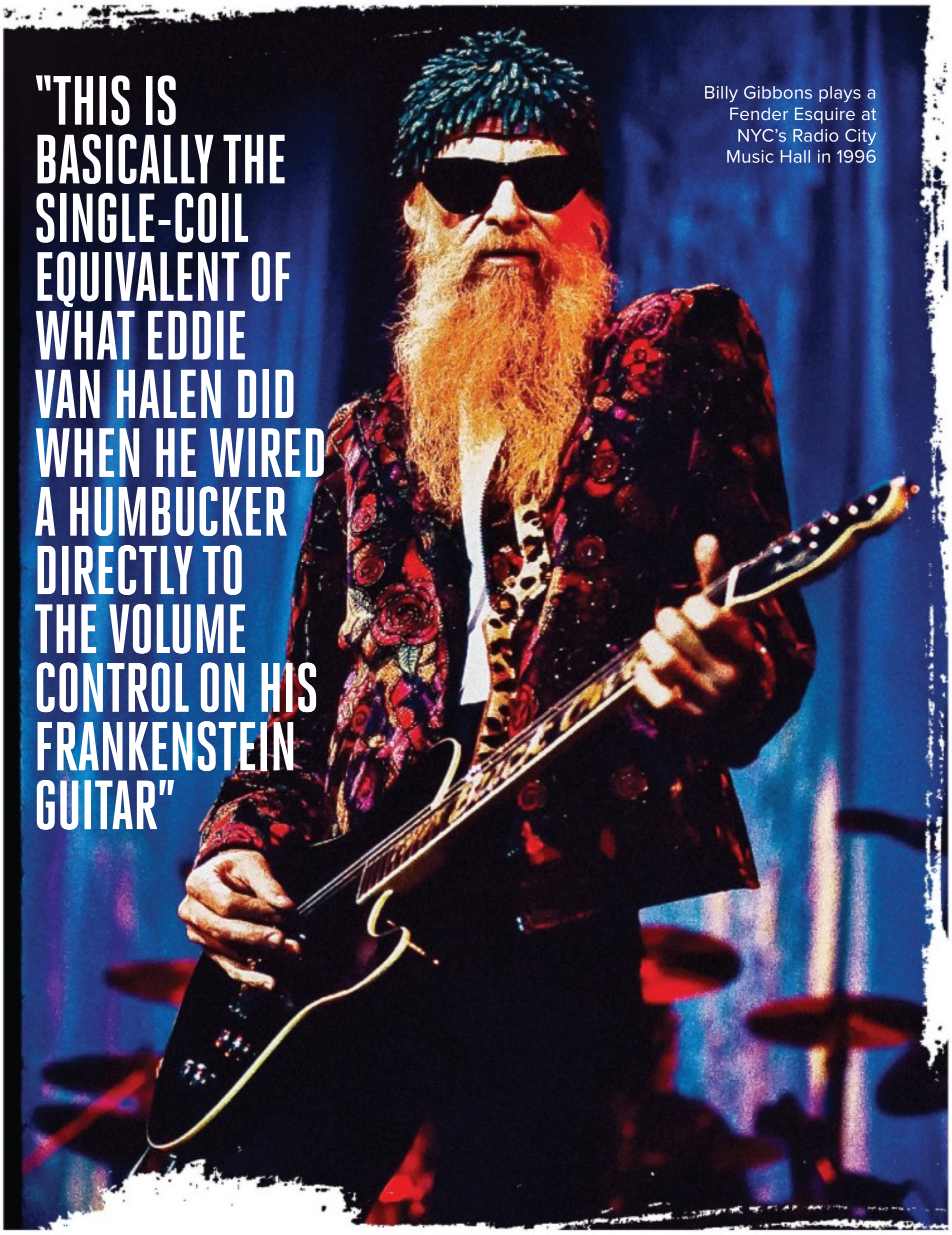
PROS **Solid build quality; touchscreen; treadle; flexible signal chain; huge range of effects; tuner; audio interface capability**

CONS **When using the C1 footswitch, you have to be careful not to hit the treadle and accidentally cut the volume**

CATEGORY: **SOLIDBODY ELECTRIC GUITAR**

1950-69, 1986-PRESENT FENDER ESQUIRE

BY CHRIS GILL



"THIS IS BASICALLY THE SINGLE-COIL EQUIVALENT OF WHAT EDDIE VAN HALEN DID WHEN HE WIRED A HUMBUCKER DIRECTLY TO THE VOLUME CONTROL ON HIS FRANKENSTEIN GUITAR"

Billy Gibbons plays a Fender Esquire at NYC's Radio City Music Hall in 1996

CHRIS GILL

IT'S PRETTY DAMN cool that the very first commercially produced solidbody electric guitar, the Fender Esquire, can still kick serious butt today; you can't say that about too many 75-year-olds. Many guitarists often forget that the Esquire came before the Telecaster and that a two-pickup version of the Esquire, which came a few months after the single-pickup version, was essentially the first Broadcaster/Nocaster/Telecaster. But here I'm just going to focus on the single-pickup version.

Featuring just one single-coil pickup in the bridge position, a volume knob and a tone knob, the Esquire seems like a no-frills minimalist design. However, if you look closely you'll notice it also has a three-position blade switch. Instead of the usual pickup switching function, this switch ingeniously provides access to three different wiring configurations that enable it to maximize the potential of its otherwise minimalist design. As a result, the Esquire also provides distinctive tones that aren't available from the Telecaster.

In position one (switch all the way back pointing to the bottom of the guitar) the pickup is wired to the volume control only, taking the tone potentiometer and capacitor out of the equation. This is a bright and bold setting that's perfect for loud solos that cut right through the mix. This is basically the single-coil equivalent of what Eddie Van Halen did in 1977 when he wired a humbucker directly to the volume control on his legendary Frankenstein guitar, but pre-dating Eddie's feat by 27 years.

In the middle position the tone pot and cap are added to the circuit, resulting in the same setting and similar tones as a Telecaster's bridge pickup-only setting. The third position (full forward) was something Leo Fender designed so the Esquire could be used as an ersatz bass (mind you this was before he invented the Precision Bass). Here, the tone pot is bypassed again, but a capacitor and resistor are wired to the switch to provide a bass roll-off function.

The original Esquire with its butterscotch blonde finish, maple neck and black pickguard still looks as cool as it did in the mid Fifties when a young Jeff Beck was seduced by the instrument in the hands of Gene Vincent's and Little Richard's guitar players in The Girl Can't Help It. When Beck got his own Esquire in late June/early July 1965, he showcased its versatility on Yardbirds tracks like the howling train whistles and grinding riff of "The Train Kept A-Rollin'," the psychedelic squall and feedback experiments of "Shapes of Things," the percussive rave-up of "I'm a Man" and much more.

Other notable artists and recordings featuring the Esquire include Johnny Cash's early Sun singles with Luther Perkins, Steve Cropper on Booker T. and the M.G.'s "Green Onions," Syd Barrett and David Gilmour with Pink Floyd, Paul McCartney with the Beatles, Bruce Springsteen throughout his entire career, Brian May on Queen's "Crazy Little Thing Called Love," Billie Joe Armstrong with Green Day and many others. Billy Gibbons is a particularly notable connoisseur par excellence who has brandished many dazzling custom Esquires with ZZ Top over the years.

Today, Fender/Squier offers a variety of Esquire models updated with bridge humbucking pickups as well as the super-cool Brad Paisley Esquire, which sort of "cheats" with its hidden Seymour Duncan Secret Agent neck pickup and bridge/both/neck Tele-style wiring. But whether it's a vintage version or a modern update, nothing quite defines the phrase "less is more" than a Fender Esquire.

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